



CITY OF ROCKFORD  
2030  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

THE CITY OF  
**ROCKFORD**  
ILLINOIS, USA

Adopted by Rockford City Council on: Date to Come



# Acknowledgments

A special thanks to the residents of Rockford, the region as a whole, City of Rockford employees, and the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee members, whose thoughtful discussions, insights, and ideas provided the basis for the update to the City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan and implementation strategies that will ultimately make this plan successful.

This document was prepared for the City of Rockford with assistance from the following individuals and organizations

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## A Vision Statement for the City of Rockford, Illinois

### What is a Vision Statement?

Developing a Vision Statement is an essential step in the process of creating or updating a city comprehensive plan. Vision statements focus attention on a community's values, sense of identity, and aspirations. The vision statement tells a story and paints a picture of an ideal future for the city and our region as a whole. Usually, they're no longer than 2-3 sentences. The City of Rockford vision statement represents the guiding principles for the community as it faces new challenges and complex choices.

The residents of Rockford envision a future city that celebrates our cultural diversity, has thriving downtown events and art attractions, builds on its strong history of economic opportunities through continued improvements in our education systems, and a mission to deliver outstanding public services to improve the safety and health of the community as a whole. Such planning will take the cooperation and teamwork of both new and seasoned leaders to identify and advance both existing and future opportunities for increased economic growth and transportation improvements that benefit the City of Rockford, making it a more desirable place to live for all.

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## INTRODUCTION

### What is a Comprehensive Planning Document?

The City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan is the result of a multi-phase, coordinated, comprehensive, and continuous planning process (3 C's). A comprehensive plan is a vision for the future focusing on policies and strategies to guide physical development that assist both the city and the private sector. Three of the biggest tools that are used to implement the plan are the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, and our Engineering Design Standards. This plan will be the official long-range planning and policy guide for the City of Rockford over the next 10 years or so.

The comprehensive plan acts as a guide to coordinate and align zoning and land-use, transportation infrastructure, economic development investments, natural resources and open space protection, and the general needs and concerns of community members. It serves as the community's voice and portrays what the future could look like while serving as the decision-making tool for elected and appointed officials regarding overall development, conservation, and public investment within the City of Rockford's municipal boundary.

Typically, the comprehensive plan is prepared based on 10-20 year projections and the City of Rockford will review this plan about every 5 years. To this same point, the plan may need to be amended in order to reflect current or changing trends over time. The City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan should be revisited and re-written at a minimum of every 10 years.

The plan is used to guide growth and development through smart growth principals with a focus on long term land use, transportation, economic development, and open space. The plan will also cover topics such as housing, public health, and education, just to name a few.

### Comprehensive Planning Guidelines in Illinois

Under the Illinois Municipal Code (65 ILCS 5/11-12-5), every city or village planning commission or planning department is charged with preparing and recommending a comprehensive plan for the present and future development or redevelopment of the municipality. The comprehensive plan covers the entire incorporated area of the municipality, and it can extend to areas up to 1.5 miles beyond the corporate limits of the municipality, as long as that land is not incorporated by another municipality. If this unincorporated territory is within 1.5 miles of two or more corporate authorities, the communities should adopt a boundary agreement to decide which municipality has planning jurisdiction over that territory (65 ILCS 5/11-12-9).





## Overview of the Planning Process

The City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan was last completely updated in 2004 when it was adopted by the members of the Rockford City Council. At the time, the 2020 Comprehensive Plan recommended that there be a 10-year review of the plan. The plan was amended in 2008, 2009, and 2011 based on reviews. These amendments were minor, and mostly included updated maps and boundary information. As recommended by City Council, the 2020 Comprehensive Plan was reviewed by city staff. The main purpose of the review was to evaluate the current planning strategies toward achieving the plans vision. At the end of the review process in 2014, city staff recommended updating the strategies to align better with current conditions in the city and to continue considering other regional planning documents developed or updated since the original plan was adopted in 2004. The 2020 Comprehensive Plan review process concluded in May of 2015 with a City Council approval of the 5-year, 2015-2019 Implementation Plan.

This most recent update to the City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan began in 2020. Initial work focused on the research and review of existing comprehensive plans, regional plans, and other development initiatives by the surrounding communities that have an impact on our city and region as a whole.

The next phase of the planning process involved making decisions on what type of Steering Committee to have, how to organize and implement the required Public Par-

ticipation strategies, and the development of a draft outline. Ultimately, the draft outline, after refinement, was used to guide the research necessary to gather the data and information necessary to begin writing the chapters.

Extensive data gathering was used to drive the information that will be presented in each chapter. Various local, regional, and national datasets were researched and utilized in order to be able to present the following information.

Additionally, recent photographs of the city were taken to compliment this information and data, and to help capture the essence of what makes Rockford unique and attractive to so many residents and visitors alike.





## Key Topic Areas

A comprehensive plan is usually a region's only public document that describes the community as a whole in terms of its complexities and interrelated systems. The plan should focus on many areas and from as many viewpoints as possible. Reviewing the past and current conditions using a broad perspective for both short-term and long-term community decisions is imperative. The real value of a comprehensive plan is that it provides for the coordinated timing and location of development or redevelopment. This is something that zoning or subdivision regulations by themselves do not do.

## Public Participation & Community Involvement

The purpose of focusing on public participation as an important part of a comprehensive plan update is to ensure that the community's needs are addressed to the furthest extent possible. It's very important to engage with the public early in the process using an array of techniques and strategies, and to include multiple opportunities for participation in the process by as many people as possible. It's easy to ask the community for input, but ensuring that participation is productive and equitable may be more difficult given the impact of COVID-19 and the restrictions in place limiting in-person gatherings at the beginning of this process. However, by utilizing digital engagement and outreach strategies, combined with gathering information at more controlled and smaller events, the results from public participation efforts were successful.

By actively engaging the public throughout the duration of the comprehensive plan update, citizens have the chance to influence decisions that are important to them. Public involvement is essential to gather enough information to accurately



The **City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan** relies heavily on public input, and engaging the region's residents. We encourage anyone who lives in, near, or regularly visits the City of Rockford to participate in the process by taking this survey!

**CLICK HERE → <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RockfordPlanning2022>**



The **City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan** will include extensive community outreach, visioning, and public input. It is the official long-range planning and policy guide for the City of Rockford. It acts as a guide to coordinate and align the following over the next 10 years:

- zoning and land-use
- transportation infrastructure
- economic development investments
- natural resources and open space protection
- the general needs and concerns of community members

The plan serves as the community's voice and portrays what the future of Rockford could look like. It is also a tool for elected and appointed officials to use in making decisions regarding overall development, conservation, and public investment within the City of Rockford's municipal boundary.



Please direct any questions to:  
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ly represent the public. Engaging the public early in the process is important. It's also important to have a clear, concise, and realistic message that's consistent throughout the planning process. This will help to garner support and ensure a more equitable and successful plan implementation phase.

The following list represents the public participation and community engagement efforts made by staff throughout the entirety of the planning process:

- Rockford City Market engagement efforts included open discussions and information provided to community members, a visioning board, and community survey was given. With the assistance of the Region 1 Planning Council, city staff was present at two Friday night city markets: once in July and again in August of 2022.
- City Staff attended two local high school career fairs where we had the ability to discuss topics that were important to teenagers living in the region. A half-day was spent at both Boylan Catholic High School and Jefferson High School. Students also had the ability to take a digital survey to assist in identifying areas the city was doing well in, and areas that may need extra attention.
- Staff developed an online community survey with 11 questions that varied from basic demographic information, community rankings, funding alignment, and open-ended comments sections. The survey went live in February 2022, and was left open until the draft plan comment period was over. The results were compiled in May 2022, and at that time there were 930 completed surveys. The detailed results are provided in the Public Participation Review and Analysis Chapter at the end of this plan.
- The City of Rockford Draft Comprehensive Plan was completed internally in the fall of 2022, after which an extensive internal review by city staff was finalized. The draft plan was released to the public for reading and to act as the official public comment period running from April 10th to May 10th, 2023.

### **Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee is comprised of members invited to participate in the planning process from the beginning to end, by the City of Rockford. These members represent local community leaders, neighborhood associations, developers, business leaders, and citizens at large. The role of the Steering Committee is to oversee the successful completion of the comprehensive plan through review of the

draft plan, submitting comments and edits, reviewing the various topics, approaches, and policies outlined, assist in planning the public participation process, and help encourage public comment. Additionally, the Steering Committee will aid in the development of chapter goals, objectives, and implementation strategies which will ultimately ensure the plans success.

The committee had the following responsibilities:

- Develop a vision statement for the plan,
- Provide guidance through the entirety of the process,
- To review data, charts, and maps for accuracy and ease of understanding,
- Provide comment and input during all phases of plan development and engagement,
- Identify issues and concerns during plan development and draft review period,
- Relay any public comments or questions that were submitted on your behalf,
- Assist in public participation process and consensus around the plan,
- Represent and portray broad community interests, and
- Act in an advisory capacity to city council or planning committee if necessary.

### **Implementation Strategies**

Comprehensive plans are turned into reality by concerted, coordinated, and consistent attention to implementation after the final plan has been adopted by City Council. This requires that the city administration, managers, departments, and staff at present and in the future, utilize the comprehensive plan as a key reference for decision making and important actions moving forward. Aligning the chapter implementation goals to strategic planning and development initiatives through policies furthers the objectives in the comprehensive plan and helps to ensure a successful implementation phase.





## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Introduction & Background

Having a historical perspective of a city and the surrounding region helps a person to better understand a community and the planning process that goes into making it attractive. The geographic location of Rockford is important for many reasons, as is our location in relationship to other places within the context of the region as a whole. The physical and social characteristics of a city help one to understand how people live, where they work, and how they move from place to place. Understanding Rockford's characteristics including history, development patterns, geography, and weather provide a holistic overview of what makes our city a unique and desirable place to live, work, and raise a family in.

This chapter offers an overview of the city and its residents both historically as well as the existing conditions of the region. This information sets the basis for an understanding of the types of communities present in Rockford as well as the overall sense of what type of place Rockford is for both residents and visitors.

### Geography & Location

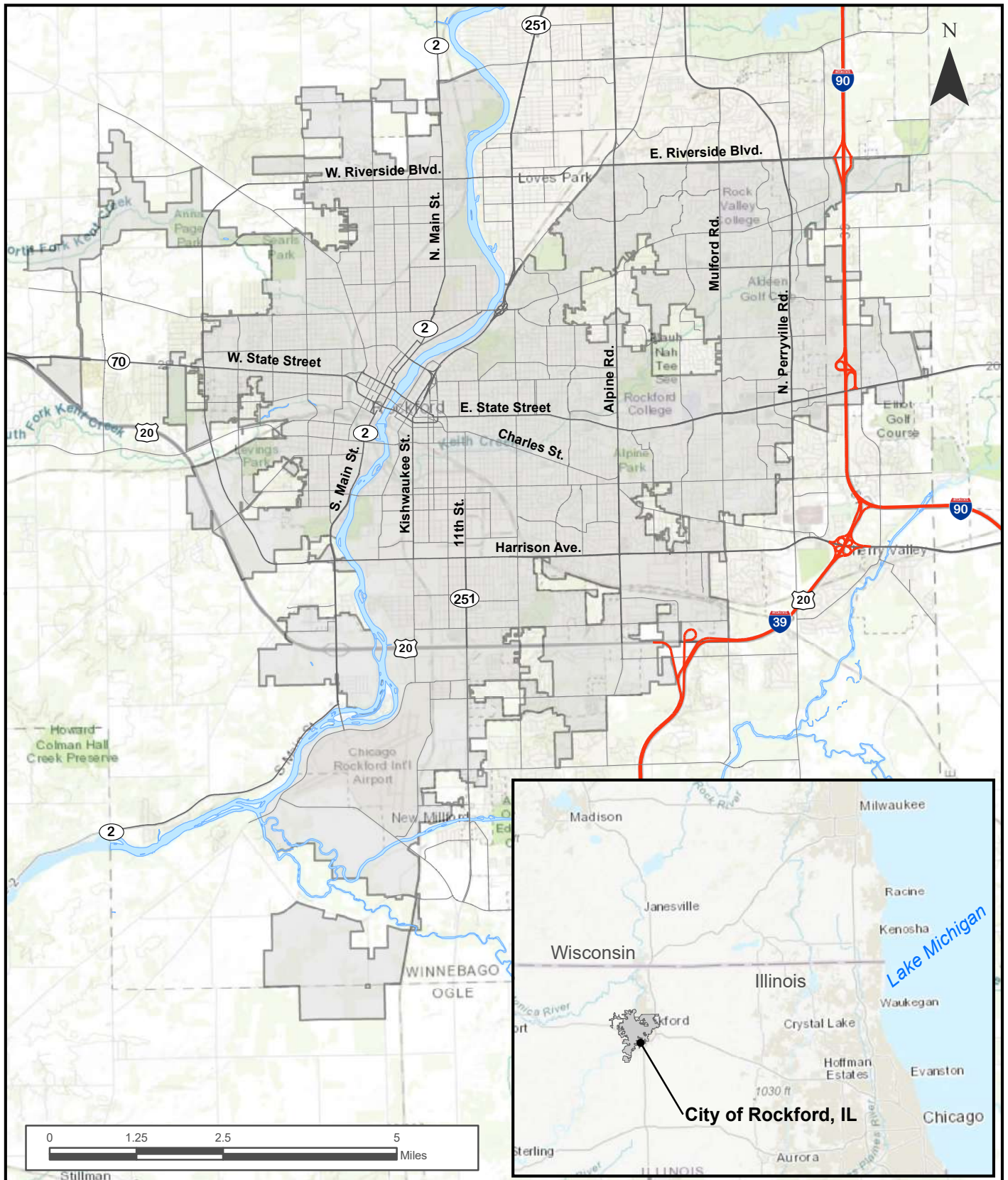
The City of Rockford is located in northern Illinois along the Rock River, about 90 miles northwest of Chicago. Rockford is closely, and nearly equally, distanced from the Cities of Milwaukee and Madison Wisconsin, Dubuque Iowa, and Chicago Illinois. All of which are about 1.5-2 hours drive. Our close proximity to other large cities, and the ease of travel between them all, contributes to Rockford's competitive market advantage.<sup>1</sup> The city encom-

passing the Rock River was no accident. In fact, the Rock River was a prominent feature in northern Illinois during the early settlement period acting as a travel route, food source, and means of fertile crop production. The weather varies from hot and humid in the summer to cold, snowy, and dry in the winter. In general, the State of Illinois is flat and northern Illinois has very little topography.



Historic Photo of Rockford City Hall - 425 E. State





## City of Rockford History & Background

### Native American History & Pre-Settlement

Before the 1700's, northern Illinois was predominantly populated by the Illinois and Miami Native American tribes. As Europeans pushed further inland, many tribes were forced to relocate and the density of the regions inhabitants gradually increased. What we now commonly refer to as northern Illinois became home to a variety of tribes including the Winnebago (Ho-Chunk), Sauk, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Fox, Kickapoo, and Dakota Sioux. While each tribe had its own culture, values, languages and religion, we know that the tribes of this region flourished due to the climate, natural resources, and the ability to travel easily due to the geography and network of navigable river ways. Northern Illinois also provided inhabitants with plenty of opportunities for both farming and hunting due to the prairies and woodland areas. These same areas also provided them with various plants, trees and animals, which they used for clothing, food, shelter, medicine, and ceremonial purposes. Northern Illinois' many rivers, creeks, and lakes provided an abundance of fish and water fowl, and aided in easier travel and trade in the region.<sup>ii</sup>

### The Early Years of Settlement

Settlement of the region began in 1834 as two different groups developed both the east and west sides of the Rock River. On the west bank, Germanicus Kent and Thatcher Blake, with his slave Lewis Lemon, founded Kentville. On the east bank of the river, Daniel Shaw Haight made his settlement known as Haightville. With the location of these settlements equidistance between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, the combined settlement became known as "Midway." In 1836, Winnebago County was formed by taking a portion of the then Jo Davies and LaSalle Counties and combining them. Midway was named as the Winnebago County seat at that time.<sup>iii</sup>

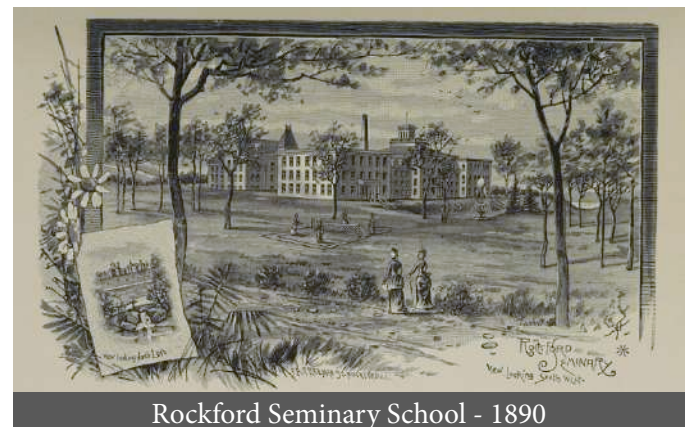
In 1837, the area was renamed Rockford. The City of Rockford got its name from a combination of the major river that runs through the city's center, the Rock River, and a shallow spot that the original settlers of this area used to cross the river, a ford. Additionally, a post office was established in 1837 with Daniel Shaw Haight as the first postmaster. In 1839, the settlement was incorporated as a village. In 1840, the first weekly newspaper began circulation and by 1877, Rockford had a successful daily newspaper.<sup>iv</sup>

### Continued Growth, Settlers & Origins

The settlement really began to grow by the 1850's. In 1851, the Rockford Water Power Company was organized and shortly after, a dam was constructed across the Rock River in order to produce a lot of cheap power. The Rockford dam would lead to the region becoming one of the largest manufacturing centers in the United States while being surrounded by agricultural fields and natural areas for miles. Large numbers of Irish-born immigrants arrived in the 1850's, and a few Swedish immigrants had made Rockford their home by 1852. After the Civil War, Swedish immigrants began to come in large numbers and quickly became the largest ethnic group in the city. They settled primarily on the east side, and in areas along 7th Street and Kishwaukee Avenue. At that time, the Swedish Language was as common as English in Rockford right up until the late 1920's. Other significant ethnic groups that had a presence in early Rockford were the Italians (after 1880), Poles and Lithuanians (after 1900), Laotians, Vietnamese, and Hispanics (after 1970). While one of the founders of the city, Lewis Lemon, was an African American, this population of the city was very small until after the first World War, after which people from the South, particularly Arkansas and Mississippi, arrived in the city.<sup>v</sup>

### Rockford University

The Rockford Female Seminary was chartered in 1847, converted to Rockford College in 1892, and became fully coeducational in 1958. On July 1st, 2013 the college was renamed a final time to Rockford University, the name we are familiar with today. One of Rockford College's most notable graduates was Jane Adams (1881), who was the founder of Chicago's Hull House and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.<sup>vi</sup>



### Industry, Manufacturing, & the Early Economy

The Rock River not only offered a convenient and safe place to cross near today's downtown Rockford, but also allowed for the construction of the Rockford Dam. This



development provided electricity from the water-power supplied by the dam that was constructed in the mid-19th century. This ultimately led to the development of Rockford as a manufacturing and industrial epicenter located in the middle of an agricultural area. The region's farming machinery manufacturing business began in the 1850's when John H. Manny developed a combined reaper and mower. The furniture and carpentry industry in Rockford was a result of the influx of Swedish carpenters who arrived with the extension of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad to the Rock River in 1852. Rockford's early economy was based on manufacturing, as it is today, including machining, tools, screws and fasteners, hardware, and automotive parts, to name a few. In fact, the city's early nickname was Screw City, for the amount of fasteners the city produced that were used world-wide.<sup>vii</sup>

By the 1880's, Rockford had established itself as a major furniture industry. By utilizing the talents of Swedish craftsman that had moved to the area, Rockford became the second largest furniture manufacturing center in the United States in the early to middle part of the 20th century. Rockford was a bit, unique, however in that the furniture companies here were co-operatives. This was a different approach to business which put a significant portion of control, and also creativity, into the hands of the laborers and craftsman. The city's agricultural industry was already in a decline by the first World War, and the furniture industry was severely affected by the Great Depression and the second World War. Due to these events, by the end of the 1960's both the furniture and farm implement industries had been wiped out.<sup>viii</sup>

Population, Socio-Demographic Profile & Trends

The demographic characteristics of the city's population have continued to change since 1990, some in ways that were anticipated and others that were not. The following pages outline some of the changes that have occurred.

Population Growth

Rockford's total population generally aligned with expectations of the projections in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan. However, while the previous plan anticipated a population increase from 152,871 in 2010 to 163,730 in 2020, actual numbers showed a slightly smaller increase in population from 1990 to 2010, followed by a slight decline by 2020, according to the U.S. Census. The 2020 U.S. Census population for Rockford was 148,655. Recent estimates show a slight but continued increase.

Census data for the past 30 years, shows overall population growth in both the urbanized and rural areas in Winnebago County. However, Rockford's population as a percentage of the county total has been slowly declining. While this drop has not been significant, decreasing from 55 percent in 1990 to 52 percent in 2020, the City of Loves Park, in contrast, has seen a three-percent increase in population over the last 30 years. The Village of Machesney Park and the remainder of Winnebago County has seen a smaller population increase of one percent. However, the City of Rockford has more capacity for new growth due to its size, location, and amenities.

Rockford Population Growth	Number				Percent Change			
	1990	2000	2010	2020	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020	1990-2020
Rockford	139,426	150,115	152,871	148,655	8%	2%	-3%	7%
Loves Park	15,462	20,044	23,996	23,397	30%	20%	-2%	51%
Machesney Park	19,033	20,759	23,499	22,950	9%	11%	-2%	21%
Winnebago County (remaining)	78,992	87,500	92,662	90,348	11%	6%	-2%	14%
Winnebago County (total)	252,913	278,418	295,266	285,350	10%	6%	-3%	13%
% City of Rockford	55%	54%	52%	52%				

1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics. Illinois: 1990, Part 1  
DP-1. Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics. Illinois: 2000  
U.S. Census 2010. DEC SF1 Summary File P8 RACE  
U.S. Census. 2020 Redistricting Data (PL 94-171) (P1 RACE)

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Rockford's minority population increased by nearly 170 percent between 1990 and 2020, growing from an estimated 26,408 in 1990 to 70,986 in 2020. In 1990 the minority population was just under 19 percent and grew to just over 48 percent by 2020. The majority of residents (52 percent) in the city were White in 2020. The second largest racial group in the city is Black or African American alone, comprising 23 percent of the population. The remainder of the city's population is comprised of: 10.5 percent Two or More Races, 3.5 percent Asian, 10 percent Some Other Race, 0.4 percent American Indian or Alaska

Native, and 0.02 percent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

From 1990 to 2020, the Hispanic or Latino population grew from 5,210, or about 4 percent of the total population to 29,583, or 20 percent of the total population in 2020. This equates to over a 450% increase in this population alone within the City of Rockford, according to the U.S. Census estimates.

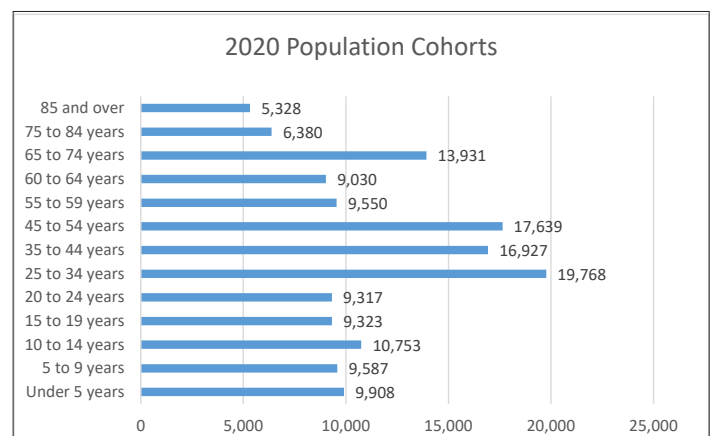
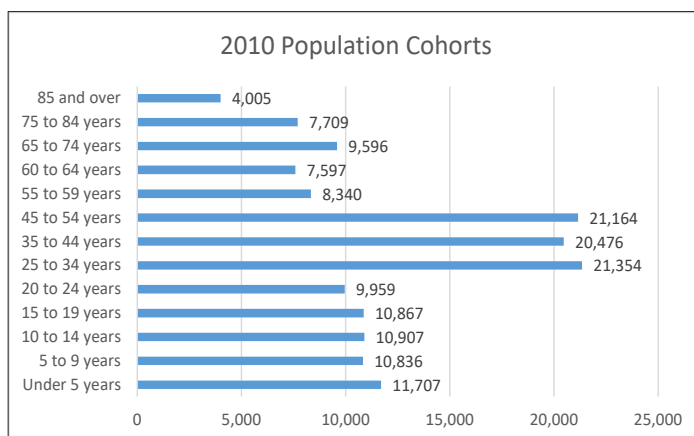
	Number				Percent Change			
RACE	1990	2000	2010	2020	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020	1990-2020
White alone	113,018	109,303	99,517	77,669	-3%	-9%	-22%	-31%
Black or African American alone	20,697	26,072	31,359	34,240	26%	20%	9%	65%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	429	474	614	1136	10%	30%	85%	165%
Asian alone	2,405	3,301	4,443	5,213	37%	35%	17%	117%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	24	67	41	44	179%	-39%	7%	83%
Some other race alone	2,853	7,200	11,413	14,750	152%	59%	29%	417%
Two or more races	-	3,698	5,484	15,603	-	48%	185%	
Total Minority	26,408	40,812	53,354	70,986	55%	31%	33%	169%
Total Population	139,426	150,115	152,871	148,655	8%	2%	-3%	7%
Percent Minority, %	19%	27%	35%	48%	-	-	-	-

	Number				Percent Change			
ETHNICITY	1990	2000	2010	2020	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020	1990-2020
Not Hispanic or Latino	134,216	134,837	128,786	119,072	0%	-4%	-8%	-11%
Hispanic or Latino	5,210	15,278	24,085	29,583	193%	58%	23%	468%
Total	139,426	150,115	152,871	148,655	8%	2%	-3%	7%
% Hispanic or Latino	4%	10%	16%	20%	-	-	-	-

1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics. Illinois: 1990, Part 1  
DP-1. Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics. Illinois: 2000  
U.S. Census 2010. DEC SF1 Summary File P8 RACE  
U.S. Census. 2020 Redistricting Data (PL 94-171) (P1 Race)

## Age Distribution

The median age of Rockford's population has also increased over the last 20 years. The median age in 2010 was 35.8 and in 2020 it was 37.8. During the same time period the **population under the age of 15 has decreased slightly from 21.6 percent in 2010 to 20.5 percent in 2020. In 2020, those under 5-years-old made up 6.7 percent of the population. Those between 25 and 34 years old made up the largest age groups in the city at 13.4 percent of the total population. These two age groups also made up the largest portions of the population in 2010. The 65 to 74 year old age group saw the largest population increase from 2010 to 2020 from 9,596 (6.2 percent), to 13,931 (9.4 percent).**



U.S. Census 2010 and 2020 ACS 5-year Demographic Estimates. DPO5

## Households

While Rockford's population has increased by 5.5 percent between 2000 and 2019, the number of households has stayed relatively stable. The number of households grew from roughly 59,158 in 2000 to 59,551 in 2019, an increase of 0.7 percent. Household size also stayed stable from 1990 to 2019, with a median household size of 2.5 people in 1990 and 2010, and 2.4 in 2019. In 2019, 64.4 percent of all Rockford households contained only one or two persons, while 22.0 percent of households contained four or more persons. According to new data from the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS 5-years estimate (2016-2020), the total number of households has increased to 62,011.

Households	2000		2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Rockford	59,158	55%	59,827	53%	59,551	52%
Loves Park	8,144	8%	9,392	8%	9,738	9%
Machesney Park	7,756	7%	8,798	8%	8,969	8%
Winnebago County (remaining)	32,922	31%	34,449	31%	36,521	32%
Winnebago County (total)	107,980	-	112,466	-	114,779	-

Families	2000			2010			2019		
	Total Households	Single Parent Households (female only)	Percent	Total Households	Single Parent Households	Percent	Total Households	Single Parent Households	Percent
City of Rockford	59,158	5,803	10%	59,827	8,291	14%	59,551	6,501	11%

*Note: The 2000 U.S. Census ONLY included the number of female single-parent families*

Households Below Poverty	1990		2000		2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population below poverty level	18,127	13%	26,791	18%	33,312	24%	31,942	22%
Under 18 years below poverty level	7,078	20%	13,276	35%	14,484	40%	12,181	34%

The City of Rockford's single-parent households made up 9.8 percent of total households in 2000, 13.9 percent of total households in 2010, and then dropped to 10.9 percent of total households in 2019. For the most part, these households are located throughout the city without any noticeable concentrations.

While the number of households in Rockford has been stable over the last 20 years, the City of Loves Park and Village of Machesney Park have seen substantial increases in the number of households (19.6 percent and 15.6 percent, respectively) over the last 20 years. Similar to Rockford, the number of households in other areas of Winnebago County has remained stable over the last 20 years.

## Educational Attainment

While gains have been made in the disparity of educational attainment across the community, more work remains to be done to continue to close the gap. Overall, the educational attainment of Rockford's population has increased in the last few decades. In 2000, 78 percent of the population over the age of 25 was a high school graduate or higher (including equivalency). Over the years this number has steadily increased from a low of 75 percent in 1990 up to 84 percent in 2019. While the percent of the population with a high school diploma has increased pretty significantly, the number of college graduates has increased at a much slower pace. Increasing by 1 percent every 10 years starting at 19 percent in 1990, and reaching 22 percent by 2019.

Despite these gains, Rockford still lags behind Illinois and the nation in the number of high school and college graduates in recent years. When looking at the 2020 U.S. Census ACS 5-year average, Illinois has just under 90 percent of the 25+ population with a high school degree or higher, and 35.5 percent of Illinois has a bachelor's degree or higher when looking at the



population 25 years and older. At the national level, just over 90 percent of the population 25 years and older has at least a high school education while those 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree rose to just under 38 percent.

Educational Attainment	1990		2000		2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than 9th grade	7,981	-	7,384	8%	7,326	7%	5,827	6%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	14,669	-	14,014	15%	12,411	12%	9,935	10%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	33,483	-	30,000	31%	32,764	33%	29,774	31%
Some college, no degree	20,724	-	20,281	21%	19,753	20%	22,347	23%
Associates degree	4,933	-	5,448	6%	7,386	7%	7,783	8%
Bachelor's degree	12,191	-	12,196	13%	13,074	13%	13,289	14%
Graduate or professional degree	5,145	-	6,864	7%	7,527	8%	8,480	9%
High school graduate or higher	76,713	75%	-	78%	80,494	80%	81,673	84%
Bachelor's degree or higher	17,573	19%	-	20%	20,650	21%	21,769	22%
Population 25 years and over	89,742	-	96,187	-	100,241	-	97,435	-

1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics. Illinois: 1990, Part 1  
U.S. Decennial Census 2000 DP1, DP3 & SF1. Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics. Illinois  
U.S. Census 2010. DEC SF1 Summary File P8 RACE  
U.S. Census. 2019 ACS 5-year Estimates, DP02

### Economic Characteristics

According to the U.S. Census, Rockford's employment rate has stayed relatively stable since 1990. While there have been events to cause larger increases or decreases over the years, the rate always seems to stabilize back out over time. Unemployment rates were 6.1 percent in 1990, 4.7 percent in 2000, 7.3 percent in 2010, and 6.6 percent in 2019.

In 2019, median unemployment rates by census tract ranged from a low 0.0 percent (geography with very few households) to a high of 35.8 percent, with a median unemployment rate of 7.0 percent for the entire city. Generally regions around the perimeter of the city have higher unemployment rates, especially in the west and southwest portions of the city.

Median household income increased by just under 15 percent between 2010 (\$38,573) and 2019 (\$44,252). While these gains appear to be a positive factor, the fact remains that Rockford did not increase at the same rate as Illinois and national figures. In 2010, Rockford's median household income was only 69.2 percent of the state median household income (\$55,735) and 74.3 percent of the national level (\$51,914). By 2019, these figures had dropped to 67.2 percent (\$65,886) and 70.4 percent (\$62,843), respectively. Generally, people earning below the median income are concentrated in downtown and southwest Rockford. Households earning above the median income are located outside downtown Rockford, particularly in the northern and southern portions of Rockford.

Unemployment Rates in Rockford	1990		2000		2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Unemployed	4,247	6%	5,380	5%	8,576	7%	7,582	7%

Median Household Income	2019
Rockford	\$44,252
Illinois	\$65,886
United States	\$62,843

Vacancy Rate	2010	2019
Homeowner vacancy rate	1%	2%
Rental vacancy rate	4%	7%

1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics. Illinois: 1990, Part 1  
U.S. Decennial Census 2000 DP1, DP3 & SF1. Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics. Illinois  
U.S. Census 2010. DEC SF1 Summary File P8 RACE  
U.S. Census. 2019 ACS 5-year Estimates, DP02

In 2010, manufacturing accounted for 20.4 percent of jobs in Rockford and by 2019 had only increased slightly to 21.9 percent. The local economy is still heavily dependent on manufacturing compared to the nation where only 10.1 percent of the workforce is in manufacturing. The Rockford Public School District (RPS205), UW Health, Mercy Health, OSF Healthcare, and Collins Aerospace are some of the top manufacturing companies in our city that employ Rockford residents.

Employment by Industry in Rockford (2019)	Number	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	155	0%
Construction	2,753	4%
Manufacturing	13,867	22%
Wholesale trade	1,304	2%
Retail trade	7,291	12%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3,409	5%
Information	890	1%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	2,076	3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	6,571	10%
Educational services	3,666	6%
Health care and social assistance	10,082	16%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	6,321	10%
Other services, except public administration	3,258	5%
Public administration	1,440	2%
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	63,083	-

2019 ACS 5-year Estimate S2407 Industry by Class of Worker for Civilian Population

## Housing

Renter-occupied units have increased from 39.5 percent in 2010 to 45.8 percent in 2019. In contrast, owner-occupied units have decreased from 60.5 percent in 2010 to 54.2 percent in 2019. The number of vacant housing units has also decreased from 13 percent to 10.4 percent between 2010 and 2019.

The homeowner vacancy rate has increased from 1.3 percent in 2010 to 1.9 percent in 2019. The rental vacancy rate has also seen an increase from 4.2 percent in 2010 to 7.0 percent in 2019. Causes for higher vacancy could be attributed to Rockford's substantially large supply of older housing, areas of higher poverty and unemployment, and the movement of people out of the city or to other cities and states. Whatever the root causes, these numbers point to a trend the city would like to better understand in order to improve the issue.

Housing Occupancy	2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Occupied housing units	59,827	87%	59,551	90%
Vacant housing units	8,930	13%	6,918	10%
Total housing units	68,757	-	66,469	-

## Summary

- Rockford's total population was similar in 2000 and 2010, then decreased by about 4,200 between 2010 and 2019.
- At the same time, the city's minority population increased substantially, with growing diversity among all minorities.
- The population is aging, with the median age increasing from 35.8 years in 2010 to 37.8 years in 2020.
- While the population has changed in the last 10 years, the number of households has remained relatively stable.
- Rockford has seen a decrease in single-parent families from 59,827 in 2010 to 59,551 in 2019.
- The population 25 years and older with high school diplomas increased from 80 percent in 2010 to 84 percent in 2019, while the percentage of those with a bachelor's degree or higher, went from 21 percent in 2010 to 22 percent by 2019.
- Rockford's percentage of households who earned \$50,000 to \$99,999 remained at around 40 percent in both 2010 and 2019.
- Owner-occupied units have decreased from 60.5 percent in 2010 to 54.2 percent in 2019.
- The number of vacant housing units has decreased from 13 percent in 2010 to 10.4 percent in 2019. For a more detailed discussion of current housing conditions, please refer to the Housing Chapter.

While the City of Rockford may be growing its municipal boundary, it is not keeping pace with growth in areas such as population and housing units as compared to other areas of Winnebago County. When population and household totals are viewed in light of Rockford's substantial increase in geographic area, the city's population has become less dense overall. This

is somewhat expected, though, as the city grows outward it incorporates areas that are less dense being that they're more rural. The City of Rockford's population density was 3,485 people per square mile in 1980, 2,680 people per square mile in 2000, 2,502 people per square mile in 2010, and the people per square mile was 2,250 in 2020. As the density of a city decreases you generally see implications in terms of the increase in cost of city services, environmental expenses, response time of emergency personnel, and overall increases in maintenance fees.

## Growth Projections

### Scenario Overview

Population projections are ways to estimate what the population could look like at a future date based on past and expected trends. Population projections were generated from 2019 out to the year 2040 to estimate what the population could be in Winnebago County annually. The three projections used were a baseline of no additional growth from current trends, a one percent annual increase in population from current trends, and a one percent annual decrease in population from current trends. The baseline projection uses the current population estimates for 2019 to determine the growth over the time-frame of 2019 to 2040. The positive growth scenario took the baseline population and increased it by one percent to show what a quickly growing region could look like. Using the negative growth scenario the baseline population was decreased by one percent annually to determine what the population growth would look like if it grew at a very slow rate. When looking at population projections, Winnebago County is only projected to grow by approximately 10,000 to 11,000 people over the next 20 years based on current and projected trends.

### Baseline Scenario

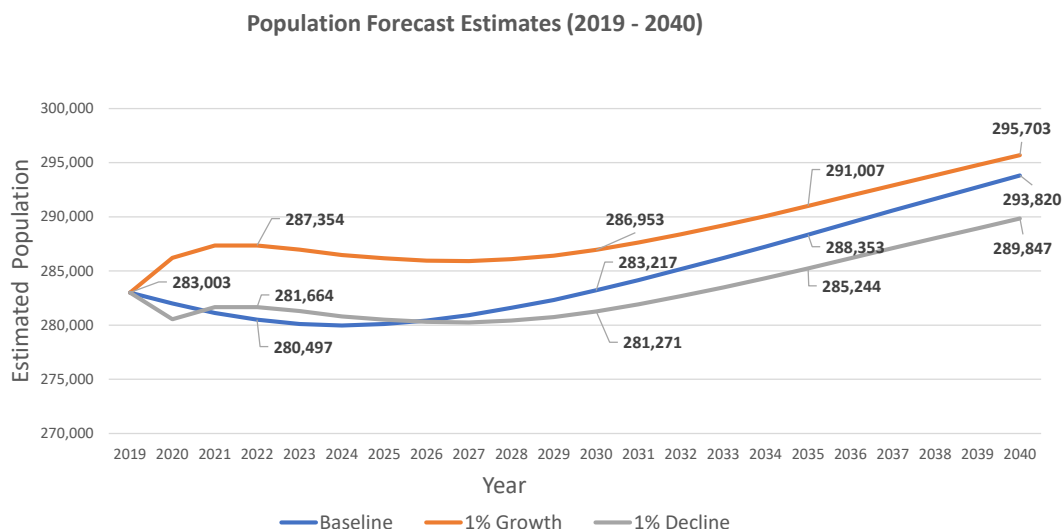
If Winnebago County continued to grow at its current rate, the population would initially dip during 2019 and 2024, then steadily increase from 2024 to 2040. The population would grow from 283,003 in 2019 to 293,820 (an increase of 10,817) by 2040.

### Positive Growth Scenario

If Winnebago County's population increased by one percent (+1%) per year, population would increase initially during 2019 to 2022, then dip down during 2022 to 2027, followed by a steady increase from 2027 to 2040. The population would grow from 283,003 in 2019 to 295,703 (an increase of 12,700) in 2040.

### Negative Growth Scenario

If Winnebago County saw a one percent (-1%) decrease in population growth annually, the growth rate would slow down very quickly and be represented by a population decrease for a few years followed by fluctuating population levels until about year 2026/2027. The population rate would then start to turn positive after 2027, then steadily increase from 2027 to 2040. The population would grow from 283,003 in 2019 to 289,847 (an increase of 6,844) in 2040.





## Chapter Endnotes

- i      <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rockford>
- ii     <https://tinkercottagemuseum.wordpress.com/2017/11/30/native-american-tribes-of-the-rockford-area/>
- iii    <http://genealogytrails.com/ill/winnebago/rockfordtoday.html>
- iv     <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rockford>
- v      <https://www.gorockford.com/about/history/>
- vi     <https://www.gorockford.com/about/history/>
- vii    <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rockford>
- viii   <https://www.gorockford.com/about/history/>



## LAND USE PLANNING

### Introduction & Background

Land use planning is the process of regulating the use of land by a governmental entity in an effort to promote more desirable social, environmental, and economic outcomes. The desired outcome results in a more efficient use of land resources. Land use planning aims to put similar land uses near one another to improve the overall continuity, efficiency, and safety of users. By grouping comparable land uses near each other, there are less conflicts of interests and the type of land use activity can be planned for accordingly.<sup>1</sup> Land use planning is an important function of a city's ability to grow in an equitable manner. With proper planning, prioritization and forward thinking, future development for both residential, commercial, and industrial services can occur in concert with one another. This results in compatible land uses working in unison with one another while causing the least disruption to different nearby land uses and land users.

### Zoning and Land-Use Connection

Land use and zoning involves the regulation of the use, development of land, and the built structures or buildings that are present. The most common form of land use regulation is zoning. Zoning regulations are used by municipalities to control and direct the development of property within their borders or jurisdictions. Land use is the characterization of land based on what can be built on it or what the land is best suited for. Land use dictates what type of structures or uses are allowed on a given parcel of land. Ultimately, growth is regulated through zoning reg-

ulations that define, and limit the allowable land use for every parcel within incorporated Rockford.

Land use and zoning are a function of one another in that zoning defines in more detail what the function of that particular land use is. Zoning has two major functions: administration and enforcement of the zoning ordinance. Zoning administration includes the zoning application process for zoning map amendments, special use permits and variances requested by property owners or developers, and with providing background information and recommendations to the Zoning Board of Appeals on all requests for zoning changes. Zoning also includes review of all building permits for compliance with the zoning ordinance, and enforcement of the ordinance by responding to complaints and following up on previous zoning cases. Zoning also provides zoning clearances for building permits, permanent sign permits, fence permits, and parking lot permits. It also issues permits for home occupations, dumpster enclosures, temporary banners, and inflatable signs among other things. Zoning also verifies the municipal boundary for new water meter requests.

The following elements also play a crucial role in land-use planning:

Land Use Plan Map – Provides a generalized map of the region showing where broad types of uses should be allowed and not allowed based on the type of use. It establishes land uses along corridors, right-of-ways, and unin-

corporated areas for development of future streets, roads, and all other development. Additionally, there is a Future Land Use Map that outlines areas for future development and expansion of city services.

Subdivision Ordinance – Governs the division of land and establishes minimum requirements for improvements such as streets, sidewalks, public utilities, and stormwater drainage. The current ordinance was adopted in 2007 and amended in 2015. It is generally used for review of developments up to 1½ miles beyond the city limits.<sup>ii</sup>

Zoning Ordinance – Governs the site-specific designation of allowed uses on individual parcels of land, as well as parking and landscaping requirements, location of buildings, location and size of signs, traffic circulation, and access. The current ordinance was adopted in 2008, was amended in 2021, and is updated regularly as per state statute requirements. The ordinance is based on the concept of performance zoning, which allows maximum flexibility for the developer while at the same time resulting in the most specific designation of what is allowed on a particular parcel. In addition, incorporating performance requirements into the overall mix of zoning requirements can make seemingly incompatible uses compatible.<sup>iii</sup>

Building Code – Governs construction and/or renovation of structures; the city adopts the most recent editions of ICC and NFPA codes governing commercial construction, one and two-family dwelling units, electrical, mechanical, and property maintenance with local amendments along with the Illinois Plumbing Code and the Illinois Accessibility Code. Code adoption is implemented on a five-year cycle.

## History of Annexation

Annexation is the process by which a municipality brings property into the city limits that previously was unincorporated. It's one of the primary means by which a city is able to grow in size. Cities annex territory to provide areas with municipal services like city water, sanitary sewer/wastewater treatment, rubbish removal, recycling, composting services and public safety, especially fire protection services. Generally, unincorporated residential properties are on well water and have a septic system with a leach field which are often incompatible with urbanized areas due to the risks involved with contamination. Annexation is also a means of ensuring that current and future residents and businesses outside a city's corporate limits who benefits from access to the city's facilities and services share the tax burden associated with constructing

and maintaining those facilities and services. For example businesses and commercial/industrial developments require access to adequate water supplies, wastewater, electricity and the city's transportation network, which may not otherwise be provided to unincorporated areas. In fact it's common to annex property with the sole purpose of a specific development or planned project that is dependent on these city services to commit to investing in a new building site.

The city's planning division is responsible for implementing the annexation policies that are in place. The policies were first adopted in 1984, revised in 1993, and are currently being updated/revised. They are designed to promote the orderly growth and development of the city rather than inconsistent and irregular boundaries. Staff processes petitions for annexation for voluntary annexations, and water agreements for property owners connecting to the city water system. Staff is also responsible for working with developers and property owners who wish to annex large areas into the city. In these cases, staff must often address zoning questions; street layout on the property; land use issues where proposals differ from what is shown on the city's adopted plan map; access to and from the property; and availability of public utilities, i.e., sanitary sewer and city water. If these negotiations are successful, an annexation agreement between the city and the property owner is developed and approved by the city council, if the city is not currently contiguous to the property.

While these annexations are obviously important in terms of the tax dollars they generate, they are important for other reasons such as continuity and order as well.

## Delivery of Secondary Titles

A major motivating factor in the annexation program is to create some degree of logic to the corporate limits of the city. Difficulties arise from both irregular outer boundaries and from islands of unincorporated land inside the city. These irregularities lead to confusion in determining who should respond to emergency calls; to duplication of services by both the city and Winnebago County in patrolling fringe areas and islands; and to gaps in what should ideally be continuous services, such as street maintenance, snow removal and garbage pickup. The cleaner we make our boundaries, and the fewer internal holes there are (islands), the more efficient both Rockford and Winnebago County can be in terms of ability to provide fast and efficient service to their citizens.



## Planning Public Improvements

It's not only important to determine who receives city services at the present time but to also account for and plan for those areas that will most likely need services in 5, 10, or 15 years from now. For example, knowing our ultimate planning boundary enables us to plan where and how many fire stations we will need in the foreseeable future, where we will get the most return from investments in infrastructure such as roads and water mains, and where to invest public tax dollars in order to create economic growth, new jobs, and opportunities for all.

In pursuing its annexation policies during the late 1980's and 1990's, the city succeeded in bringing four islands into the city, including: the Ken-Rock area (with added help from the Superfund money spent to connect homes in the area to the Rockford water system), simplifying the boundary with Loves Park along Forest Hills Road and East Riverside Boulevard, bringing the Greater Rockford Airport into Rockford, and extending the corporate limits eastward to the Boone County line.

## Boundary Agreements

In some ways, potentially the most important element of the annexation program is the agreements worked out between Rockford and five of its municipal neighbors including Cherry Valley, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Rockton, and Davis Junction. The city currently does not have boundary agreements with the City of Belvidere, Winnebago, and New Milford. By having long-term agreements defining a municipality's ability to annex, we can each concentrate on providing services within a specified area instead of spending vast sums of money to entice income-generating developments into our municipality. By working together as a region rather than against one another, we're all stronger and more resilient.

Unfortunately, while this has been the goal, the reality in practice has been that the city continues to heavily subsidize and offer incentives to greenfield development even after these boundary agreements have been put in place. This has been done primarily to entice specific retail sales tax generators to choose a Rockford site rather than one in another community. The end result has been that capital investment dollars that could be targeted for the rehabilitation or replacement of existing infrastructure is diverted to greenfield development. This is particularly true for water main, sanitary sewer, and transportation investment.

Over the past 20 years, the city annexed areas that are now occupied by Lowes Distribution Center, Walmart

(East State), Sandy Hollow Quarry, Bell School/Spring Creek/I-90, and the Mercyhealth Hospital on East Riverside Boulevard. Housing developments occurred as a result of the annexation of the Hope VI Housing Area (west side), Kelly Meadows (southwest side), Wesley Willows, Redington Chase, and Stevens Ridge (all on the northwest side). Also, the southwest corner of Bypass 20 and South Main Street and the area south of the airport at Edson Road-South Bend Road were annexed for future industrial development. The city also succeeded in bringing in five islands including Bradley Heights (Spring Creek & Bradley), Glenney View (City View & Rockton), Meadows of Spring Brook (Spring Brook & Springwheat), Country Oaks (Lyford & Cloverdale), and Larwinn (Bell School/Meander & Lyford/Conehill).

## Policy Priorities

As previously stated, the city is currently in the process of updating its annexation policies. Focus should be working toward the following objectives:

- Establish priority annexation areas with a high priority on the elimination of unincorporated islands
- Bring in existing properties with pre-annexation agreements especially those that are sales tax producing properties
- Eliminating the Rock River Fire District through strategic annexations
- Financial incentives will only be provided to assist with development in the priority areas
- Evaluate the priority annexation areas and ultimate annexation boundary every 10 years

The city is working to pursue an aggressive annexation program along West State Street. Incentives should be considered to entice businesses on well water to hook-up to city water. The city should consider a mix of commercial and industrial development to help grow jobs and increase the tax base. Balanced growth and economic development is key to revitalizing this corridor as well as controlling the land use.

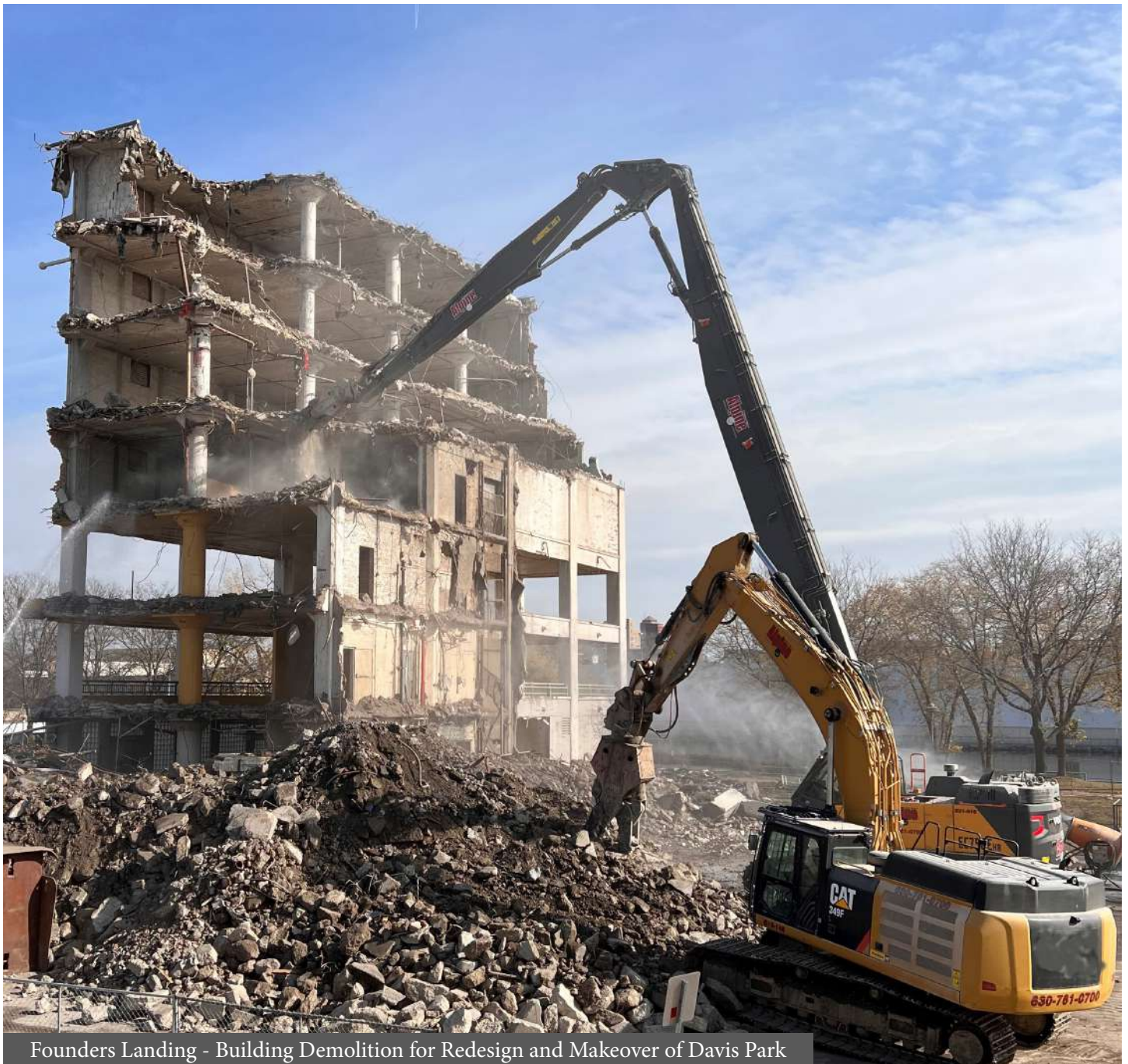
Continuing to work on priority areas listed in the annexation policies that are largely developed and where annexation will occur in small pieces. This includes the northeast islands, Charles Street, the southeast islands along 20th Street, and the unincorporated areas on the west and

southwest. Primary emphasis should be on areas where uneven boundaries act as barriers to balanced growth and areas where there is a lack of economic development activity.

Continue to work with the Four Rivers Sanitation Authority to create joint agreements for any new sewer projects in which the city participates in.

Develop an annexation agreement boundaries with the Villages of Winnebago and New Milford, and the City of Belvidere.

Prevent new development on private well and septic systems within the Ultimate Annexation Boundary.



Founders Landing - Building Demolition for Redesign and Makeover of Davis Park



# Annexation History for the City of Rockford



BOONE COUNTY

OGLE COUNTY

## Legend

### Rockford Annexations AnnexYear

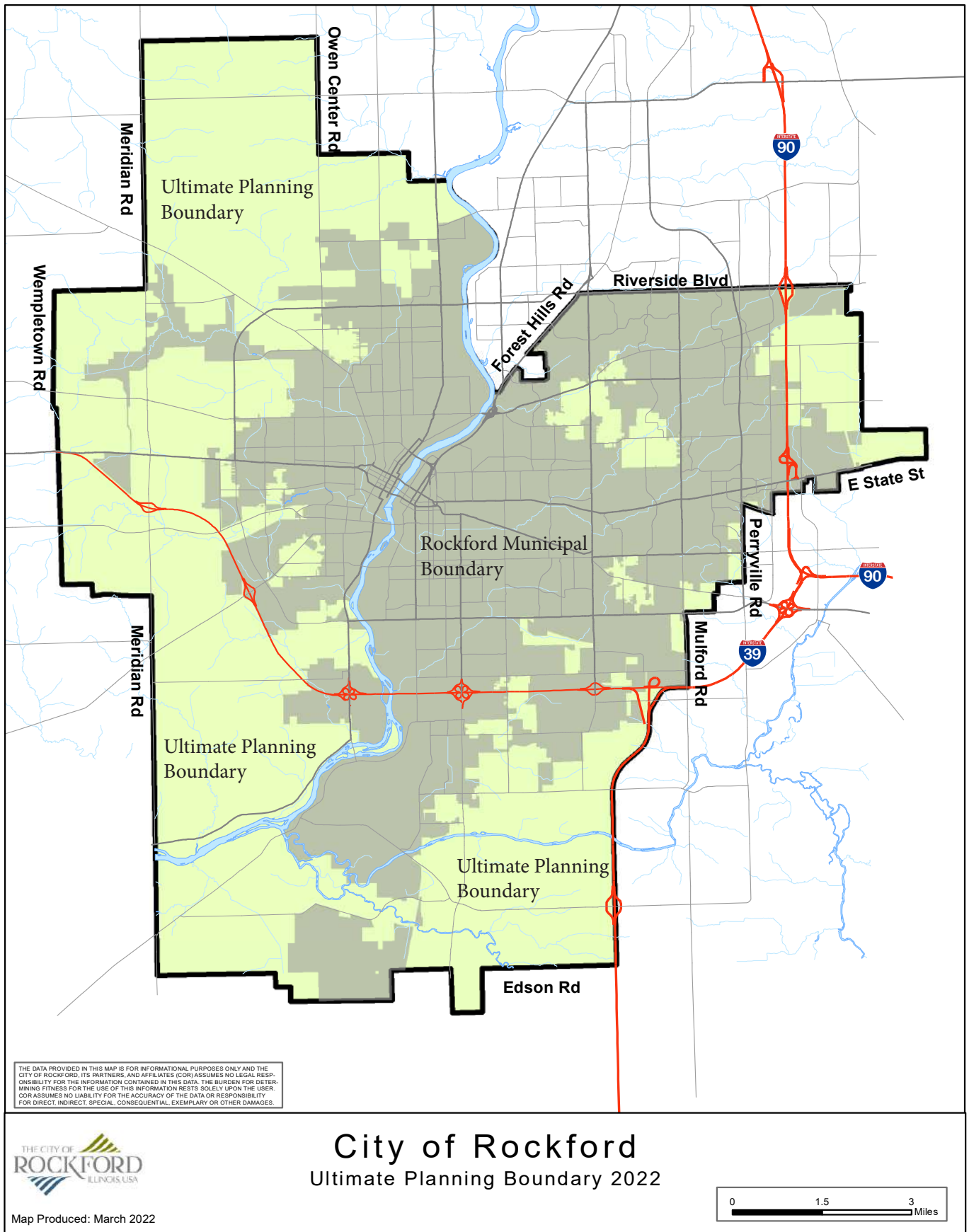
- Prior to 1925
- 1925-1929
- 1930-1939
- 1940-1949
- 1950-1959
- 1960-1969
- 1970-1979
- 1980-1989
- 1990-1999
- 2000- 2009
- 2010-2019
- 2020- 2022

1 inch = 1,960 feet

Map Prepared By:  
City of Rockford  
Construction and Development Services  
Community Development Department  
Darius Morrow  
Last Update: May 2022







## Current Zoning

### Map Designations

The current zoning map provides several categories for residential, commercial, and industrial areas for a total of 12 zoning districts. To aid in the proper use and interpretation of the map, the following definitions for each district are provided.

### Residential Districts

Rockford's residential "R" zoning districts are intended to create, maintain, and promote a variety of housing opportunities for individual households. It has been established to maintain the desired physical character of existing neighborhoods and develop areas consistent with the city's official comprehensive plan. These regulations are intended to ensure that permitted and special uses are compatible within each district. Additionally, these zones are intended to maintain and protect residential property values and promote peace, quiet, and enjoyment in the city's residential areas by requiring setbacks and open spaces on the same lot as the residential development.

While these districts primarily accommodate residential use types, some non-residential uses may be allowed within residentially designated zones. For instance you may find small home businesses such as daycare, small engine repair and services, and tax professionals. However, these uses must not disrupt a neighborhood with excess traffic, noise or smell, and must apply for and acquire the special use permit for operation of a non-housing use in order to operate within a residential zone.

- R-E Rural Estate
- R-1 Single-Family
- R-2 Two-Family
- R-3 Multifamily Residential
- R-4 Multifamily Residential



Single-Family Residential Home



Two-Family Residential Home



Multi-family Residential Home

### Commercial Districts

Commercial (C) districts are intended to accommodate retail, service, and commercial uses and to ensure that business and commercially zoned areas are compatible with the character of existing neighborhoods.

- (C-1) - Limited Office District: The Limited Office (C-1) district is intended to accommodate low-intensity office development in close proximity to residential uses and to serve as a buffer between established commercial uses and residential neighborhoods. The C-1 district is also intended to allow the conversion of structures built for residential purposes to be converted to limited office use as a means to preserve these structures as well as permits limited business service uses in addition to offices provided, such services are low traffic generators. The C-1 district does not permit outdoor storage, outdoor sales, or outdoor displays.

- (C-2) - Limited Commercial: The purpose of the Limited Commercial (C-2) district is to provide a wide range of development options for the retail sale of goods and for professional and commercial services. This district limits certain commercial uses that may cause undue traffic congestion or uses that may have detrimental impacts on neighboring properties. Like C-1, the C-2 district does



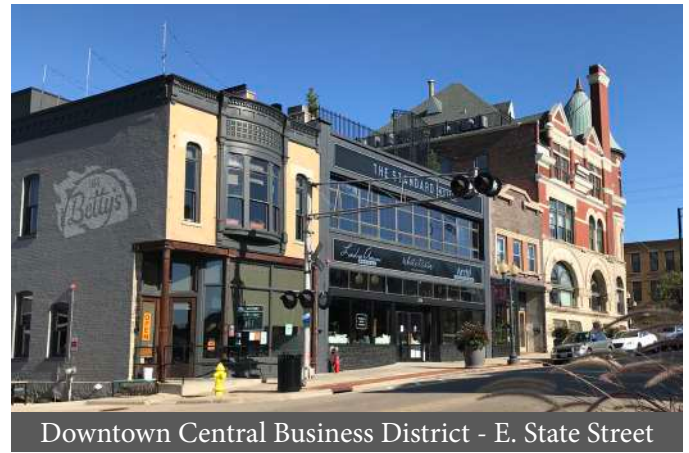
not permit outdoor storage and outdoor sales. Displays are allowed but limited to private sidewalks that abut the principal structure and areas adjacent to the main customer entrance.

- (C-3) - General Commercial: The primary purpose of the General Commercial (C-3) district is to accommodate a very broad range of business, service, and commercial uses. In terms of allowed uses, C-3 represents the highest intensity business or commercial zoning district. It allows nearly any type of business, service, or commercial use, including those involving outdoor operations and storage. Like the C-2 district, the C-3 district, development will generally be destination-oriented; a very large percentage of customers will arrive by automobile. The C-3 district is distinguished from C-2 district by the range of use types allowed, such as permitting more intensive, more auto-oriented commercial use types than does C-2. The C-3 district is intended to be applied to large sites that have primary access to major thoroughfares.



Commercial Redevelopment

- (C-4) - Urban Mixed-Use District: The primary purpose of the Urban Mixed Use (C-4) district is to maintain and promote a compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use district with a diverse mix of residential, office, business, government, cultural, and entertainment uses; promote a walkable environment by protecting those streets with “intact” street walls; encourage residential living environments that provide a broad range of housing types such as lofts, town homes, and condominiums; promote these districts as viable and vital residential areas by permitting residential uses in a wide variety of densities and locations; and promote the continued use and/or redevelopment of historically significant buildings and older buildings that contribute to the character of these districts. In terms of allowed uses, C-4 allows nearly any type of business, service, or commercial use, including those involving outdoor operations and storage.



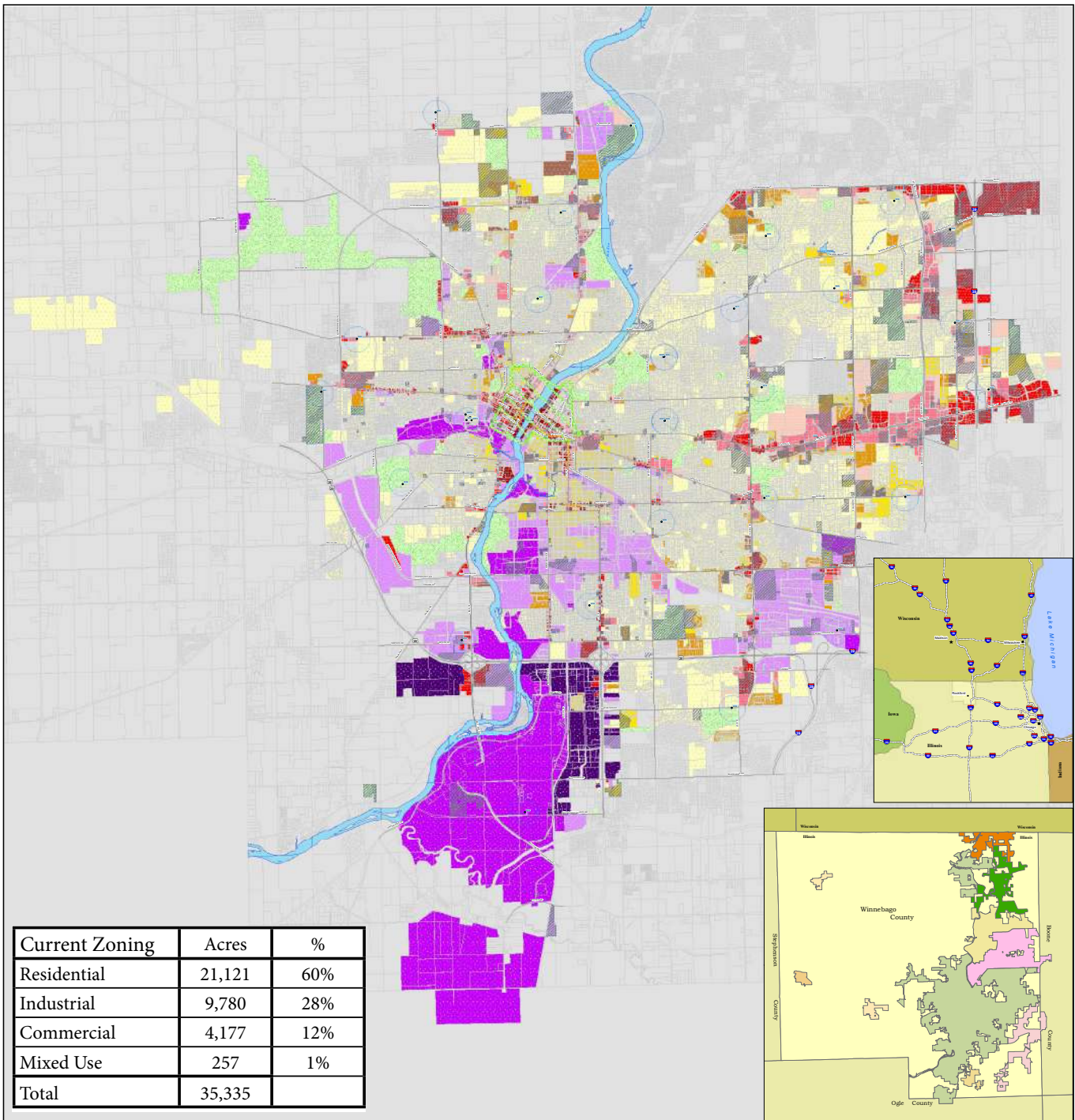
Downtown Central Business District - E. State Street

## Industrial Districts

Industrial districts (I) are intended to accommodate manufacturing, shipping and warehousing, distribution, wholesale, and other industrial uses within the City of Rockford. The district regulations are intended to: promote the economic viability of manufacturing and industrial uses, encourage employment growth, promote the development of high-technology centers, and encourage the expansion of shipping, handling, and air cargo facilities in the vicinity of the Rockford Airport.

- (I-1) - Light Industrial: The primary purpose of the Light Industrial/Business Park (I-1) district is to accommodate low impact manufacturing, wholesaling, warehousing, and distribution activities that occur within enclosed buildings. The district is intended to promote new industrial development within a “park like” environment.
- (I-2) - General Industrial: The primary purpose of the General Industrial (I-2) district is to accommodate moderate-impact manufacturing, wholesaling, warehousing and distribution uses, including storage and work-related activities that occur outside of enclosed buildings. The I-2 district is intended to accommodate more land-intensive industrial activities than the I-1 district.
- (I-3) - Airport Industrial: The primary purpose of the Airport Industrial (I-3) district is to accommodate businesses and industry that benefit from locations in close proximity to the Chicago/Rockford International Airport (RFD). This includes shipping and distribution facilities, warehousing, cargo handling facilities, and car and truck rental businesses.





## Zoning Map - Rockford, Illinois

### Legend

C1	I1	R1U	Preannexation Agreements
C2	I2	R2	Special Use Permit
C3	I3	R3	Arts and Creativity Overlay District
C4	R1	R4	Designated Pedestrian Streets
	RE		City Wells
			Well Setback Areas

0 0.5 1 2 Miles



Map Prepared By:  
City of Rockford  
Community and Economic Development Dept.  
Construction and Development Services  
Darius Morrow  
Last Update: March 2022



## Current Land-Use

While it is difficult to estimate exact trends in land use development, it is expected that a slightly larger percentage of industrial land will be needed to provide the industrial sites of the future, many of which are land consumptive. Historically, prior to the dominance of the automobile for personal transportation, industrial land was probably a higher percentage than it is today, and public/quasi-public a much lower percentage.

Currently Rockford's land use is made up of primarily residential, industrial, and commercial uses. Residential land use makes up the largest percentage of land (47 percent), ranging from single-family to multi-family residential units. Industrial and commercial land uses follow behind residential in percent of total land, as shown below. Historically, residential and commercial uses were more likely mixed, ultimately consuming less land. Today, new residential developments are often built with more spacing between them, and on larger lots. While commercial areas are surrounded by extensive parking areas that are now necessary due the dependence on automobiles to travel for day-to-day activities. Mixed-use land use accounts for just 1 percent of total land use. The current zoning map has 12 categories that have been combined into four general land use categories. As current trends in redevelopment occur, we expect to see the percentage of mixed-use development increase, especially in downtown Rockford and along other main corridors into the city.

2020 Land-Use Category	Acres	%
Residential	19,228	47%
Industrial	8,973	22%
Quasi-Public Facility	6,311	15%
Commercial	3,921	10%
Priority Park Acquisition	1,715	4%
Mixed Use	366	1%
Recreation-Entertainment-Tourism	310	1%
Area Unsuitable for Development	82	0%
Future Urban Development	12	0%
Total	40,918	

*City of Rockford - GIS Analysis*

## Future Land-Use

While it is difficult to estimate exact trends in land use, Rockford is expected to see an increase in industrial, commercial and mixed-use land uses, and a decrease in residential-only land uses. As there is an increase in industrial parks in the area, the need for more industrial land uses

will increase due to the fact that industrial sites are often land consumptive. In the future, some existing industrial land will either be adapted to new uses or remain vacant, while new industrial developments involved in transportation, distribution, packaging and other related industries will be attracted to the area by the Chicago Rockford International Airport, UPS, Amazon Prime, and other similar facilities. The opportunity for brownfield redevelopment becomes more attractive as this occurs.

As Rockford continues to grow in size and land is developed, there will also be a shift towards mixed-use developments to meet future needs of the area. Once cities have built out horizontally, they shift to building vertically to create the best use of the land while also maximizing the tax-base. For example, there may be developments that have ground-floor commercial with residential above, allowing the parcel to reach its maximum potential. Additionally, as older buildings continue to be rehabbed and returned to the market opportunities to recapture abandoned buildings diminishes.

## Map Designations

The 2020 Plan map provides for a full spectrum of land uses and of transportation facilities with a total of 43 categories. To aid in proper use and interpretation of these maps, the following definitions for each category are provided.

## Residential Categories

In addition to strictly residential uses, there are other non-residential uses that are customarily found in neighborhoods and which are allowed in these areas as permitted uses or with a special use permit in Rockford's Zoning Ordinance. Examples of these could include day care facilities and public schools.

- (RL) - Low-Density Residential: A range of 2-7 dwelling units per acre; could include single-family homes, townhouses, duplexes or any combination of these.
  - (RL-C) - Light Residential/Retail
  - (RL-CO/O) - Light Residential/Office Overlay
- (RM) - Medium-Density Residential: A range of 5-15 dwelling units per acre; could include single-family homes, duplexes, townhouses, apartments, or any combination of these.
  - (RM-CO) - Medium Residential/Office
  - (RM-CO/O) - Medium Residential/Office Overlay
  - (RM-C) - Medium Residential/Retail
- (RH) - High-Density Residential: More than 15 dwell-

ing units per acre; could include townhouses, garden apartments, multistory apartments, or any combination of these.

- Heavy Residential/Office

### Commercial Categories

Commercial land use categories are intended to accommodate retail, office, mixed-use, and other commercial uses.

- (C) - Commercial: Stores selling merchandise; no outside storage. Example: Clothing store.
- (CO/O) - Office Overlay: Office development in existing buildings, including those built as single-family homes, where those buildings have historic value. Office use would only be allowed if placed in the existing building.
  - (C-CO) - Commercial/Office
  - (C-CR) - Commercial/Recreation-Office-Tourism
- (CR) - Recreation/Entertainment/Tourist: Establishments catering to tourist, convention, and local markets. Examples: Motels and restaurants.
- (CO) - Office: Concentrations of office space. Examples: real estate office, medical office.
  - (CO-CR) - Office/Recreation-Entertainment-Tourism
  - (CH) - Heavy Commercial: Activities requiring a large land area but with low traffic volume; may include substantial outdoor storage. Examples: car dealer, lumber yard.
    - (CH-IL) - Heavy Commercial/Light Industry
    - (CH-RL) Heavy Commercial/Light Residential
    - (CD) - Commercial Mixed Use: Allows a mixture of retail and office commercial with residential uses; roughly equivalent to the C-4 District in the Zoning Ordinance. Example: Mixed use buildings on Broadway and on 7th Street.
- (CBD) - Central Business District: Rockford's downtown, also known as the River District; includes a broad range of commercial and residential uses.

### Industrial Categories

Industrial land use categories are intended to accommodate various degrees of industrial uses ranging from light to heavy as well as technology-based employment centers.

- (IL) - Light Industry: Office/research parks; small, clean manufacturing plants; and other industrial-type uses that would not negatively impact adjacent residential areas.
  - (IL-CO) - Light Industry/Office

- (IL-C) - Light Industry/Retail
- (T-C-IL) - Tech Industry/Retail/Light Industry

- (T) - Tech Industry: Technology-based employment centers; environmentally clean operations; no outdoor storage.
  - (T-IL) - Tech Industry/Light Industry
  - (T-CO) - Tech Industry/Office
  - (T-C-CO) Tech Industry/Retail/Office
- (IG) - General Industry: Most manufacturing and processing operations, including large plants and warehouses; and uses generating large amounts of truck, rail, or auto traffic.
  - (IG-C) - General Industry/Retail
  - (IG-CD) - General Industry/Mixed-Use
- (IH) - Heavy Industry: Potentially hazardous or noxious uses that should be kept separate from nonindustrial activities.

### Public/Quasi-Public Categories

Public/Quasi-Public land use categories are used to accommodate existing and future public spaces as well as areas that are not suitable for development at this time.

- (PE) - Existing (Quasi) Public Facility: All existing parks, forest preserves, public schools, colleges, country clubs, public buildings, and country clubs; other properties open to the public, such as churches, that are on large lots (minimum of 5 acres).
  - (PE-CD) - Existing Public Facility Overlay Mixed Use

### Other Land-Use Categories

- (CD) - Mixed Use: The primary purpose of the Urban Mixed Use district is to maintain and promote a compact, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use district with a diverse mix of residential, office, business, government, cultural, and entertainment uses; promote a walkable environment by protecting those streets with "intact" street walls; encourage residential living environments that provide a broad range of housing types such as lofts, town homes, and condominiums; promote these districts as viable and vital residential areas by permitting residential uses in a wide variety of densities and locations; and promote the continued use and/or redevelopment of historically significant buildings and older buildings that contribute to the character of these districts.
  - (IG-CD) - General Industry/Mixed-Use
  - (CR) - Recreation-Entertainment-Tourism



- (PA) - Priority Park Acquisition Area: Sites suitable for parks or public open space which have a high priority for acquisition by the year 2020 by the Rockford Park District or the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District; environmental elements such as existing tree lines in rural or undeveloped areas that should be protected when development does occur.

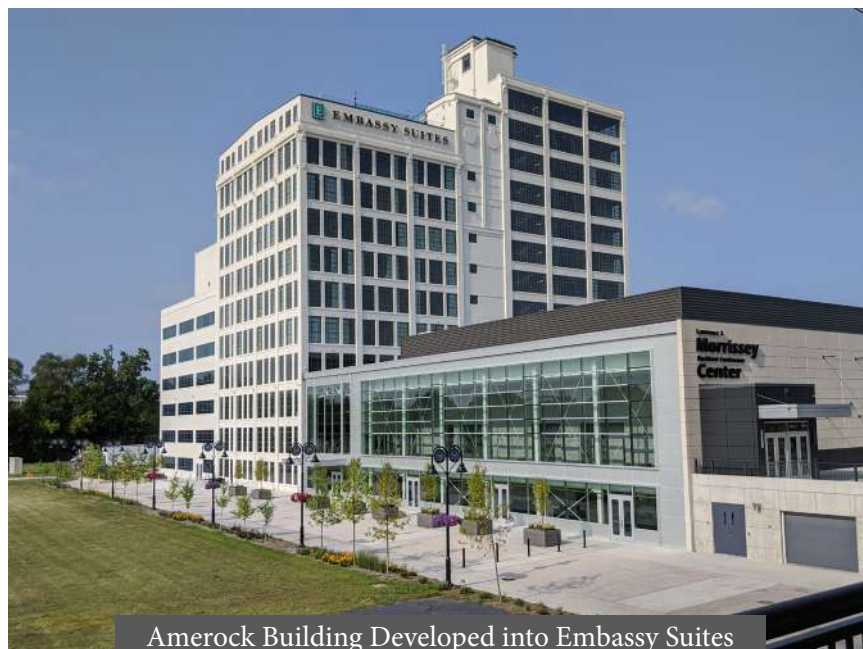
- (U) - Area Not Suitable for Development: Major wetlands, floodways and/or forested areas generally not suitable for development but may be suitable for long-term open space use or agriculture.

- (U-PA) Unsuitable Area/Priority Park Acquisition

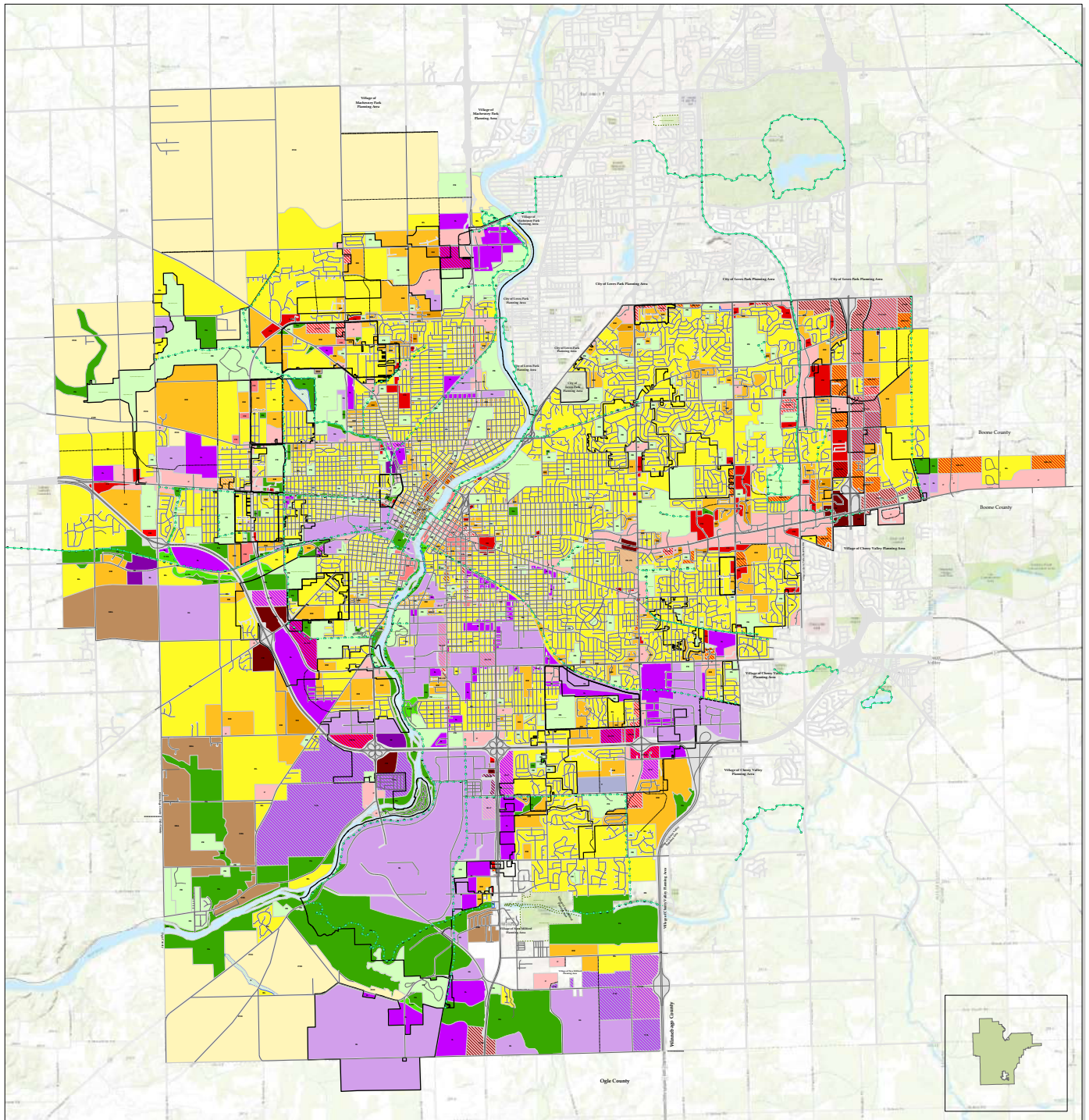
- (FUD) - Future Urban Development: Areas that are unlikely to have access to sanitary sewer by 2020, but would be suitable for urban development at some point in the future, are designated as Future Urban Development areas. The intent is to not allow non-urban development, i.e., development on private wells and/or septic systems, to occur before sewers can be installed.



Amerock Building Before Rehabilitation



Amerock Building Developed into Embassy Suites



## 2020 Comprehensive Plan - Rockford, Illinois

### Legend

C- Retail	IG- General Industry	RH-CBD- Central Business District Overlay	IG-C	T-C-IL	LandUse2020Streets
CD- Mixed Use	IL- Light Industry	Multiple Designation Areas	IG-CD	T-C-CO	Proposed Interchanges
CH- Heavy Commercial	IH- Heavy Industry		IG-CR	RL-C	Proposed Roundabout
CO- Office	T- Tech Industry		PE-CD	RM-C	Rockford City Limits
CO/O- Office Overlay	RL- Light Residential		IL-C	RM-CO	Infill Areas
CR- Recreation/Entertainment/Tourism	RM- Medium Residential		IL-CO	RH-CO	Existing Parks
PA- Priority Park Acquisition	RH- Heavy Residential		T-IG	RL-CO/O	Right Of Ways
PE- Existing (Quasi-) Public Facility	FUD- Future Urban Development		T-IL	RM-CO/O	
U- Area Unsuitable for Development	SRA- Subdivision Review Area		T-CO	RH-CO/O	

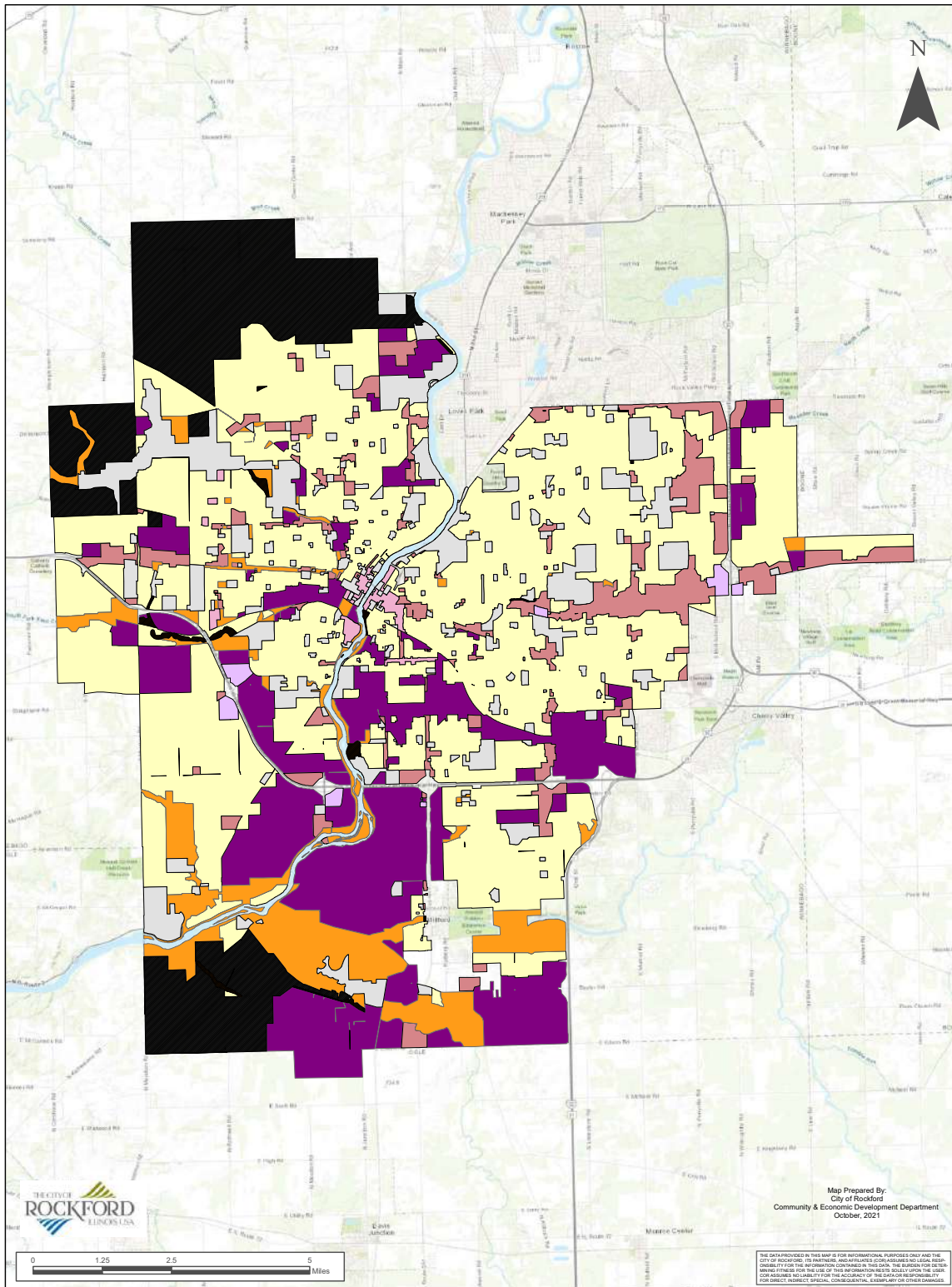
### City Overview

Date Approved/Amended
September 13, 2004
May 13, 2008
June 1, 2009
November 7, 2011

Map Prepared By:  
City of Rockford  
Community & Economic Development Department







## 2020 Comprehensive Plan - Land-Use (SIMPLIFIED) Rockford, Illinois

Residential	Commercial	Recreation-Entertainment-Tourism
Industrial	Priority Park Acquisition	Area Unsuitable for Development
Quasi Public Facility	Mixed Use	Future Urban Development



# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## LAND USE PLANNING

### Reduce surplus of city-owned parcels and structures and return publicly owned vacant parcels to taxable status

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue web-based public database for all vacant land and structures available for purchase - Land Bank (R1PC), and Trustee Program	\$	Short	High
Assemble and consolidate parcels for more desirable redevelopment opportunities	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Partner with residents, businesses, and non-profits to expand vacant land management strategies	\$	Long	Low
Create List- ID parcels that will never be able to be used for reuse. Lots of what the city owns slivers, triangles, corners. Many are unwanted. Turn over to adjacent land owners	\$	Short	Low

### Promote targeted infill development

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify current barriers associated with each Infill Area identified in the existing Comprehensive Plan	\$\$	Short	High
Market incentive packages to reduce the cost burden and encourage development in the identified Infill Areas	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Include market residential tax incentives and housing rehabilitation programs in improved outreach efforts to existing and new employers	\$\$	Medium	Low
Encourage compact and sustainable development to maximize walkability and access within neighborhood centers and commercial	\$	Long	High
Continue to encourage development in existing TIF District, Enterprise Zones, and Rivers Edge areas	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Attract new residential developments through incentives and tax abatement programs	\$\$	Medium	High
Reduction to sewer/water/building hook-up and permit fees. (Reduce costs to build through local incentives)	\$\$	Medium	Low
Replace or rehab aging housing stock	\$	Long	Medium
Strategies to address aging shopping plazas before they become blighted through lack of use	\$\$	Medium	High

### Preserve and enhance natural and environmentally sensitive areas

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Update codes and regulations to regulate development and encourage development outside of environmentally sensitive areas	\$	Medium	Medium
Use topography to direct land development taking into account slopes before new development occurs through the strategic review team	\$	Short	Medium

Establish a “green infrastructure” program to link, manage, and expand existing parks, preserves, and greenways	\$\$	Medium	Low
Establish and plan for utility corridors for future development, otherwise the potential to slow development down when water, sewer, and electric utilities are needed through private/public open space remains	\$\$\$\$	Short	High
Continue utilizing the Regional Greenways Plan for priority acquisition of critical environmentally sensitive areas	\$	Short	Low
<b>Identify high risk areas for mitigation</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to identify natural-hazard areas and track location	\$	Medium	High
Prepare and Implement Local Hazard Mitigation Plan for the City of Rockford	\$\$\$	Medium	High
<b>Support regulations to improve on site stormwater management and reduce flooding damage</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Encourage Low Impact Development designs	\$	Short	Low
Promote integration of green infrastructure and related sustainable building elements to reduce stormwater runoff such as bioswales, rain gardens, buffers	\$	Short	Medium
Conduct regular inspections of the drainage system for proper maintenance	\$	Short	Medium
Develop an open space acquisition reuse and preservation plan targeting hazard areas	\$\$	Medium	Low
Reduce residential issues with stormwater intakes being cleaned of debris. Develop a short public service announcement through water department on the importance of clearing debris	\$	Short	High
Improve street sweeper schedule through increased routes and additional funding	\$\$	Medium	Low
<b>Municipal boundary expansion and annexation agreements</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Carryout a complete reevaluation of the City’s annexation policies	\$\$	Short	High
Continue to pursue an aggressive annexation program along West State Street and other west side islands/pockets	\$\$	Short	High
Work on annexing priority areas listed in the updated annexation policies that are largely developed and where annexation will occur in small pieces	\$	Medium	Medium
Work with RRWRD to create joint agreements for any new projects which the City participates in	\$\$	Short	High
Determine long-term annexation agreements with the Villages of Winnebago, New Milford, and City of Belvidere	\$	Short	High
Prevent any new development to take place that would be on private well and septic systems within the Ultimate Annexation Boundary	\$	Short	Medium

Continue to promote targeted infill development	\$	Short	High
Opportunity exists to develop west towards Winnebago (village) due to lack of boundary agreement, this should take priority	\$	Short	High
Continue being aggressive with annexation of key development areas	\$	Short	High
Continue with strategic annexation of key properties and work to enclose all areas	\$	Short	High
<b>Find new tools for development of Residential, Commercial, and Industrial properties</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Create a locally funded Historic Trust Fund	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Adopt a Housing Occupancy Permit requirement	\$	Medium	Medium
Amortize certain types of undesirable businesses and/or land uses	\$	Medium	Low
Create a locally funded Business Development Fund	\$\$\$	Medium	High
Create a Problem Property Resolution Team within City Hall to deal with vacant and abandoned properties that drag down the surrounding areas	\$	Medium	Medium
Utilize new City of Rockford Vacant Housing Registry program data	\$	Short	Low



## Chapter Endnotes

- i [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land-use\\_planning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land-use_planning)
- ii <https://rockfordil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Subdivision-Ordinance-2016.pdf>
- iii <https://rockfordil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Zoning-Ordinance-Amendments-Approved-03312021.pdf>



## TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

### Introduction & Background

The city's leaders realize the importance of constructing efficient, equitable, safe, and multi-modal transportation networks that minimize impacts to the natural environment, while reinforcing the livability principals of each neighborhood. Transportation networks are meant to guide future growth through the development of the regions roads, corridors, and highways for both motorized and non-motorized transportation options that include public transit, personal vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrian networks to name a few. Forward-thinking investment in our transportation systems now will improve overall accessibility, equity, and sustainability for future growth priorities. These investments improve a business' ability to provide its goods and services to our region's residents and visitors through improved market access, and reduced costs to enter the marketplace. Additionally, transportation investments improve people's access to education, employment, healthcare, and other needed services while reducing the costs associated with driving, including travel time, vehicle operating costs, and road and parking facility costs. How we invest in the region's transportation system now will have a deep and long-term effect on our community's health and success moving forward.

### Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

The Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is the comprehensive program of infrastructure investment operated by the city. The program's mission continues to be the advancement of enhancing public safety, maintaining and improving the movement of commerce and economic activity throughout the city, and promoting a sense of

well-being for the community as a whole. Areas of emphasis that are apparent in this program include the programming of regular maintenance activities to economically prolong the life of our infrastructure, targeted repairs to our highway structure, improvements to our stormwater system, continued investment into neighborhood and arterial street programs, and the enhancement of our city-wide pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.

The CIP is the city's primary planning document that guides how the city spends revenue from a one-cent city infrastructure sales tax and from motor fuel taxes while leveraging state and federal investment in city transportation and infrastructure. In February 2021, voters agreed to extend the infrastructure sales tax another five years. Since 2008, it has been utilized to eliminate borrowing, resulting in saving millions in interest while paying for road and infrastructure repairs and improvements.<sup>1</sup>

The CIP should be viewed as a financial blueprint that helps prioritize needs to achieve implementation of the public improvements identified in the comprehensive plan. The level of funding in the CIP defines the financial capacity to reach the desired goals set forth.

Local Governments should make capital project investment decisions that are aligned with the Comprehensive Plan and any other relevant adopted planning documents. A list of potential projects for inclusion in the CIP come from a variety of sources but generally include department requests, plans for facility construction requests,

citizen requests, long-term capital replacement programs, neighborhood plans and projects for which grants may be available, and at the request of elected officials as well.<sup>ii</sup> The City of Rockford CIP is voted on and adopted by City Council. In November 2021, Rockford City Council approved the city's largest capital improvement plan in its history. The five year (2022-2026) CIP calls for a \$248 million dollar investment in the regions roads, active transportation facilities, storm sewer and drainage facilities, and bridge and water system repairs and improvements. It paid for 200 blocks of neighborhood streets to be paved in 2022 alone and invested more than \$4 million into the replacement of lead water service lines. Additionally, all remaining bridges with weight restrictions will be repaired or removed.

## Roadway Functional Classification

For planning and design purposes, roadways are often delineated by the role they play in the overall network. This delineation, known as functional classification, serves as a significant determination in terms of roadway design, including speed, capacity, and relationship to other roadway classes, and existing and future land use development. Additionally, a roadways functional classification can determine its eligibility for funding under the Federal-Aid Program. Federal-Aid eligible roadways include Interstate, Arterials, and Collectors.<sup>iii</sup> Roadways are classified according to two main functions: mobility and access. These two functions lie at opposite ends of the spectrum; most roads are a combination of both. Higher speeds and fewer intersections are preferred for mobility, while lower speeds and more frequent intersections support access to business, homes, etc.

The functional classification hierarchy below is listed in order from largest roadway capacity, and highest operating speeds to lowest capacity, speed, and increased access. Larger roadways provide the highest level of mobility, local roads provide very high levels of land access, and collectors have a balanced combination of both.

### Descriptions and examples of classifications are provided below:

Interstates: the highest classification of arterial highways. These roadways are designed and constructed with mobility, long-distance travel, higher-speeds, and high volumes in mind. Interstates access is limited to on- and off-ramps. Rockford is served by two interstates: I-90 and I-39.

Freeways & Expressways: look very similar to interstates, with directional travel lanes, usually separated by some type of physical barrier, and their access is limited to on- and off-ramp locations or a very limited number of at-grade intersections. They can be fully or partially access controlled, have high traffic volumes and usually serve longer regional and intra-urban trips, such as US-20.

Other Principal Arterial: generally serve major centers of metropolitan areas while providing a high degree of mobility. They may also provide mobility through rural areas. Other principal arterials can range from limited access highways to semi-limited roadways that carry high volumes of traffic and are typically used for long trips within the region, as well as connect into statewide or nationwide networks. Access along these types of roadways usually consists of at-grade intersections and a limited number of options to directly access properties along them. Examples of other principal arterials in the city include State Street, Alpine Road, and Perryville Road.

Minor Arterial: provide for high-speed or high-volume traffic, but are typically under local jurisdiction. Minor arterials often form boundaries around recognized "neighborhoods" and collect traffic from collector streets. Minor arterials provide more land access than principal arterials without penetrating identifiable neighborhoods. Some of Rockford's minor arterials include Guilford Road, Auburn Street, and North Rockton Avenue.

### **Major & Minor Collectors**

Collectors gather traffic from local roads and funnel it to the arterial network. Collectors serve primarily intra-county travel and typical travel distances are shorter than on arterial routes. Collectors are broken down into two categories:

Major Collectors: serve both land access and traffic circulation in higher density residential and commercial/industrial areas, such as Harlem Boulevard and Rural Street. Major collectors are generally longer in length, have lower driveway densities, have higher speed limits, cross streets spaced at greater intervals, have higher traffic volumes, and may have more travel lanes than their minor collector counterparts.

Minor collectors: serve both land access and traffic circulation in lower density residential, commercial and industrial areas, such as Mulberry or Summit Street.

Local Roads: or streets, are those not classified above. Local roads and streets account for the largest percentage



of all roadways in terms of mileage. They allow direct access to homes, businesses, and adjacent lands. However, through-traffic is generally discouraged from using these streets, although such traffic does occur when arterials or collectors become congested or blocked. Traffic control devices, such as stop signs, are sometimes used to discourage through traffic and help maintain slower speeds. Local streets may be able to accommodate traffic volumes close to that of collectors but volumes in excess of 400 vehicles per hour can be disruptive, especially in residential areas.<sup>iv</sup>

Roadway Systems

In addition to classifying roadways based on the function, many highways and roadways have been designated as part of a larger highway system to highlight the importance at a regional, state or national level, and to provide the proper funding mechanisms to maintain and reconstruct them. This is essential to support the transportation needs of our economy through the movement of goods.

National Highway System

The National Highway System (NHS) is a network of strategic roadways important to the nation’s economy, defense, and mobility. The NHS was developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation in coordination with the states, local officials, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO).<sup>v</sup> The NHS includes the following subsystems of roadways:

Interstate: The Eisenhower Interstate system of highways retains it separate identity within the NHS;

Other Principal Arterials: These highways provide access between an arterial and a major port, airport, public transportation facility, or other inter-modal transportation facility;

Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET): This is a network of highways which are important to the United States’ strategic defense policy and which provide defense access, continuity, and emergency capabilities for defense purposes. These highways provide access between major military installations and highways which are part of the Strategic Highway Network; and

Inter-modal Connectors: These highways provide access between major inter-modal facilities and the other four subsystems making up the NHS.

Within the city limits, there is approximately 90.8 centerline miles of roadways designated as a part of the NHS.

As a part of the NHS, these roadways must follow federal guidance on design elements, state and federal oversight procedures, and national performance measures. However, these roadway segments are also eligible for a variety of federal and state funding opportunities due to their importance.

Jurisdictional Roadway Authority

Jurisdiction is the authority and obligation to administer, control, construct, maintain, and operate a highway, according to the Illinois Highway Code. Jurisdictional responsibility within the city falls under five agencies: Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT); Illinois State Toll Highway Authority (ISTHA), also known as the Illinois Tollway; Winnebago County Highway Department, the City of Rockford, or Township. As shown in the figure below, the majority of roadways within the city fall under the jurisdiction of IDOT or the city.

Roadway Jurisdiction	Centerline Miles		Lane Miles	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
City of Rockford Municipality	683	85%	1462	81%
IDOT	50	6%	180	10%
Winnebago County	29	4%	87	5%
Township	29	4%	57	3%
Private (Includes Tollway)	9	1%	25	1%
Total	801		1,811	

Note: Townships include- Rockford, Cherry Valley, Owen, Burritt, and Winnebago  
Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) IRIS Roadway File

State Highway System

The Illinois State highway system consists of all highways under the jurisdiction of IDOT, including all interstates, other marked state and U.S. Routes, and some unmarked routes. Within the city, there are approximately 21.5 centerline miles of marked state routes and 21 miles of interstates and freeways.

Municipal Street System

The City of Rockford is responsible for over 734 miles of roadways, ranging from other principal arterials to neighborhood level local streets. The city installs and maintains approximately 260 traffic signals, and 131 bridges and box culverts. Essentially, the municipal street system consists of existing and future streets within the municipal limits that are not a part of the state or county highway systems.<sup>vi</sup> The streets and alleys, including bridges and other structures, which are or will become part of this municipal street system may be laid out, established, construct-

ed, reconstructed, altered, widened, relocated, improved, maintained, repaired, and vacated by the City of Rockford through various processes.

## System Capacity & Roadway Design Standards

Street projects often times do not exist as standalone projects. Sometimes, the scope of work includes various or multiple components that are not always related. For example, coupling a roadway resurfacing project with a water main replacement could happen. They have the potential for significant impacts, good and bad, on adjacent land uses. This has led to the use of what has been termed context-sensitive solutions (CSS) in some areas. CSS involves taking into consideration the land use and environment next to a roadway that is being planned or designed. Designers make decisions based on the impact of the roadway on the community, not just on geometrics and other engineering considerations. The ultimate goal of this approach is to find ways to meet the needs of motorists while at the same time addressing the concerns of the community that the road passes through.

### System Capacity

New roadways and major roadway capacity improvements are a result of one of three reasons: to reduce or contain existing traffic congestion, to accommodate new development in order to avoid creating congestion, or to complete a missing link in an existing street or highway network. Capacity is the maximum sustainable hourly flow rate at which vehicles can reasonably be expected to travel a section of roadway during a given time period. Volume on the other hand is the total number of vehicles or other roadway users that pass over a given point, section, or roadway during a given time.

The need for capacity improvements can be identified through the following roadway performance measures defined below:

Level of Service (LOS): This measure characterizes the operating conditions on a roadway in terms of performance measures related to speed and travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, and comfort and convenience.<sup>vii</sup> The higher the level of service, the more ease at which traffic is able to flow.

Volume-to-Capacity (V/C): To determine the efficiency of a road, the volume of the road can be used in conjunction with the design and engineering characteristics of a road (capacity) in order to determine how efficiently vehicular traffic flows.<sup>viii</sup>

Operating Speeds: Operating speeds are the speeds at which vehicles are observed operating during normal conditions, and are usually reported as an average.<sup>ix</sup>

## Roadway Design Standards

All streets are not designed the same on purpose, of course. Streets may vary by type and intensity of the adjacent land use, number of travel lanes, width of existing right-of-way, posted speed limits, traffic volumes, and characteristics such as topography and soil types. The city recognizes that streets and roads need to be viewed within the context of their surroundings when being designed. The design solutions for transportation networks need to be flexible and innovative, while balancing the needs of public roadway users with those of freight logistics and business users. The City of Rockford follows the latest accepted or adopted design standards available including but not limited to:

- Rockford Engineering Design Criteria Manual;
- Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT);
- Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE);
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA);
- American Association of State Highways and Transportation Officials (AASHTO);
- National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO);
- American Planning Association (APA);
- American with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG); and
- Active Transportation Alliance.

## Complete Streets Policy

Knowing the importance of context and the needs of all roadway users, the city adopted a Complete Streets Policy in 2017. According to this policy, complete streets are “streets that are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, in that motorists, freight providers, pedestrians, bicyclists, users of public transportation, users of all ages and abilities (including children, the elderly and the disabled), emergency responders and adjacent land users are accommodated and are able to safely move along and across a street.” This policy highlights the city’s need to develop a safe, efficient, accessible, and integrated multi-modal transportation network that balances the need and desire for access, mobility, economic development and aesthetics, while providing for the health and well-being for people of all ages and abilities.

Under the Complete Streets Policy, the city will approach every transportation project, and transportation-relat-



ed improvement, as an opportunity to create safer, more accessible streets for all users. Complete streets may be achieved through single projects or incrementally through a series of smaller improvements or maintenance activities over time, including approaching private development and re-development projects with a complete streets focus in mind. Projects may be phased to include planning, scoping, programming, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction/reconstruction, operation, and maintenance. Some of the facilities and amenities included are multi-use paths and sidewalks; crosswalks, bump-outs, or pedestrian refuge islands; accessibility improvements; traffic calming measures; street and multi-use path lighting; underground utility relocation; bicycle accommodations; and landscaped boulevards and parkways.

Traffic calming measures may be any number of things that are done to slow down traffic such as speed humps, curves in a street, traffic circles, on-street parking, narrower streets, or striping. Several recent test pilots conducted by the Public Works Department have shown that traffic calming devices can be effective in neighborhood settings, and are generally accepted by residents. As these measures become more common over time, the level of comfort by motorists should increase, as well.

The design solutions that the city identifies for each project will be flexible and innovative to balance public input on the user and modal needs of each project. The primary implementation of this policy is through the Public Works Department in conjunction with the Community and Economic Development Department.

### Major Road Improvements

Status of major road improvements within Rockford that were proposed in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, included in the city's Capital Improvement Program (CIP), or the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for the Rockford Region (2050 MTP), are included below:

#### 1st Street and 2nd Street Bridges over the UP Railroad:

The 1st Street and 2nd Street bridges over the Union Pacific Railroad deteriorated to the point where they had to be closed to vehicular traffic. These bridges are an important connection from the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods to the city's west side. The Railroad currently owns these structures, and the city is working with the Illinois Commerce Commission and Railroad to develop a funding participation plan and scope of work to replace both of the bridges.

#### 11th Street Corridor Improvements: The 11th Street Cor-





ridor is a main thoroughfare on the south side of Rockford and is in dire need of roadway, pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Furthermore, the overhead utilities and outdated intersection designs have made it aesthetically undesirable, and less safe than more modern designs. The city is currently reviewing the corridor to determine what type of improvements can be made to benefit all the various land uses along this route. This study has been completed and was adopted by Rockford City Council as an amendment to the current Comprehensive Plan. The project is expected to be completed by fall of 2025.<sup>x</sup>

15th Avenue Corridor Improvements: This project consists of the resurfacing of 15th Avenue from the Rock River to 11th Street, including an evaluation of moving the on-street bicycle facilities to an off-street path. The project would also upgrade all of the pedestrian facilities along the corridor to accommodate the pedestrian movements to Blackhawk Park, Beyer Elementary School, Beyer Stadium, and other attractions in the area.

15th Avenue Bridge: The 15th Avenue Bridge over the Rock River substructure dates back to 1933 and is nearing the end of its useful life. It is estimated that in five to ten years, the bridge will need to be closed to traffic. In order to proactively begin the process of replacing the structure, the city has applied for federal funding assistance through the Illinois Special Bridge Program. The current traffic volumes indicate that a three-lane bridge section may be an adequate replacement. This project also includes a water main replacement.

Airport Drive: The current two-lane rural roadway is inadequate for the truck and vehicular traffic of airport and surrounding growing industrial complex. The plan is to widen existing road to four through lanes and one continuous center turn lane.

Auburn Street Corridor: The city received a \$120,000 grant from the State Planning and Research program to conduct a study prior to making any improvements. The study researches possible corridor enhancement improvements that would include roadway resurfacing and widening, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, improved transit accommodations, and others. These upgrades would improve the condition, as well as support economic development and improve safety, along this vital city corridor on the west side.<sup>xi</sup>

Church Street and Main Street Two-Way Conversion: This project involves the conversion of both Church Street and North Main Street to two-way traffic from Cedar Street to

John Street. This will allow the city and state to place State Route IL-2 completely on Church Street, while designating Main Street to be the local road. This conversion will enhance the City of Rockford's central city by allowing a more walkable and bikeable community, and allow better access to many of the downtown's visitor attractions. The city is working with IDOT on the proposed conversion layout and recently completed design study.

Edson Road Widening: This project would consist of the reconstruction and widening of the current two-lane rural roadway to better support economic development along the corridor, with intersection improvements occurring at Friday Road and IL-251.

East State Street & Alpine Road Intersection: The corner of State and Alpine has been a problem intersection for many years. How to improve it was a topic of serious discussion when the Year 2000 Plan was prepared. Standard changes to the intersection – adding turn lanes, for example – were complicated by the presence of several businesses and a cemetery that would have to be moved. The current plans for the project are to reconstruct the intersection with upgraded traffic control improvements to address visibility and capacity concerns.

Harrison Avenue: In 2020, the city completed the reconstruction of Harrison Avenue from 20th street to 9th Street. However, Harrison Avenue from the Rock River to Kishwaukee Street (IL-251) is a principal arterial roadway with failing concrete, limited pedestrian facilities, and no marked bicycle accommodations. The proposed improvements would include road diet as a safety countermeasure, off-street bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, upgraded traffic signals, and decorative street lighting consistent with the previously funded portions of Harrison Avenue.

Jefferson Street Bridge over Rock River: This project would entail the full reconstruction of the bridge's substructure, superstructure, and approaches. Additionally, the project would look at reducing lanes to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian enhancements. Particular aspects of this project were included in an application for federal funds through the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program in 2020 and again in 2021.

Logistics Parkway Extension: The goal of this project is to extend Logistics Parkway from Milford Avenue to Samuelson Road, as well as resurface Logistics Parkway from Samuelson Road to Airport Drive in order to support

surrounding economic development. The Global Trade Park industrial area near the Chicago Rockford International Airport continues to grow, and so does its needs for additional supporting infrastructure. The roadway extension would include a new pavement structure, including stormwater considerations. The water main improvements will include replacement of undersized water main and the extension of water main to connect Milford Avenue and Samuelson Road. The city has finalized funding for this project.

6th & 9th Street Two-Way Conversion: The structures and ramps of the current interchange at IL-251 and Whitman Street are nearing the end of their lifetimes. One bridge has already been removed and not replaced, and the 3rd Street (IL -251) bridge over 6th Street Ramp is estimated to have less than five years left of full structural capacity. The ramps are substandard and replacing them would require additional land acquisition. The city is planning to remove the ramps and bridge, and convert 6th Street, 9th Street, and Longwood Street to two-way traffic. The benefits include: better access from the west side of Rockford to East State Street and Swedish American Hospital, better bicycle and pedestrian access for the neighborhood from the east to the Rock River, and additional greenspace for development. This project is currently in the design phase.

Lyford Road Corridor Improvements: The corridor improvements would be to realign the roadway and widen to three lanes, allowing for two through lanes and a continuous center turn lane.

Madison Street Corridor: In 2018, the city completed the Madison Street Corridor Study. Some of the elements identified in this plan have been completed, such as the incorporation of on-street bicycle lanes and improvements to the pedestrian facilities. The city plans to continue implementing elements of the plan to enhance Madison Street from Grove Street to Y Boulevard, including roadway resurfacing and widening, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, improved transit accommodations, possible railroad tracks relocation, and utility relocation.

Sandy Hollow Road: Per the city's 2015 Pavement Condition Report and the Long-Range Arterial & Collector Street Plan, this concrete pavement section of Sandy Hollow Road was one of the poorest conditioned arterial streets in the city. Improvements built upon the repair work on intersecting Kishwaukee Street were performed in 2018, and included reconstructing the roadway to a thinner, three-lane section with sidewalk and a multi-use path. The city worked with the Illinois Railway to improve

the railroad crossing surface in coordination with the project. It was completed in the Fall of 2022 at a price of approximately \$2.5 million.

Spring Creek Road & Interstate 90/39 Interchange (2020 CP & 2050 MTP): Since the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, two new I-90 interchanges identified have been constructed at Illinois 173 and East Riverside Boulevard. With these two interchanges now built, the city would like to see another one constructed at Spring Creek Road. This interchange would be aimed at addressing future congestion, accommodating future growth, and would provide a connection to Lyford Avenue.

Whitman Street Reconstruction: Currently in design engineering phase, the Whitman Street Reconstruction would address the city's 2018 Pavement Condition Report and the Long-Range Arterial & Collector Street Plan that has the section of Whitman Street from Whitman Street to the Rock River as one of the poorest conditioned arterial streets in the city. Improvements will include the reconstruction of the street plus repairs to the sidewalk and realignment of the road at the curve. The city is also considering the connection of the Mel B. Anderson Path to the Rock River Path along the south side of the roadway.

The status of the two projects identified in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan as potentially having an impact on the City of Rockford are included below:

Illinois 2: Illinois 2 (IL-2) serves as a major facility for north-south movements west of the Rock River. IDOT has recently completed the reconstruction and widening of several sections of this highway within Rockford's city limits, most notable from US-20 to Chestnut Street and from Harlem Boulevard to Light Street. The project included reconstruction, intersection improvements, drainage improvements, decorative street lighting and traffic signals, pedestrian accommodations (sidewalk and multi-use path), and landscaping components. IDOT has plans to continue to improve several segments north of Elmwood Road all the way to the Village of Rockton.

West State Street/Business US 20: In addition to the IL-2 improvements through Rockford's downtown, IDOT has also made a significant investment to West State Street (Business US-20) corridor. In 2014, IDOT completed the first phase of the reconstruction project, which included the reconstruction and widening of the corridor from Kilburn Avenue (IL-70) to Independence Avenue.

The West State Street Phase 2 reconstruction is the continuation of the West State Street corridor project, of which Phase 1 was completed in 2014. The IDOT-led project consists of a complete reconstruction of the corridor to modern standards and includes new concrete pavement, intersection improvements, drainage improvements, new water main, decorative street lighting and traffic signals, pedestrian accommodations (sidewalk and multi-use path), landscaping components, and relocated overhead utilities. This project is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the fall of 2023 for a total project cost of just under \$17 million.

## Current & Projected ADT

A significant number of vehicles utilize the transportation systems in the City of Rockford every day. The average daily traffic (ADT) is the average number of vehicles that travel through a specific point of a road over a short duration time period (often seven days or less). It is estimated by dividing the total daily volumes during a specified time period by the number of days in the period.<sup>xii</sup>

According to an analysis using the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Travel Demand Model (TDM), a majority of roadways in the City of Rockford have an ADT under 5,000, approximately 70.5 percent. Looking out to 2040, the ADT is forecasted to grow, nearly 700%, with an ADT between 20,001 and 25,000.

## Current & Projected Congestion

As mentioned previously, road capacity improvements may be needed to address existing traffic congestion or to accommodate new development in order to avoid creating congestion. Congestion often prevents the transportation system from operating in an efficient manner and is caused by both recurring and non-recurring events. Level of Service (LOS) and Volume-to-Capacity (V/C) ratio are often used as ways to measure congestion. The 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the Rockford Region was adopted by the Rockford Metropolitan Transportation Organization (MPO) Policy Committee in 2020. It evaluated the LOS and V/C ratio for major roadways (collector level and higher) in the urban area.

The method of computing LOS is based on the Transportation Research Board's 2010 Highway Capacity Manual. LOS is measured on a six-level scale, ranging from A to F, derived from a mathematical model based on multiple performance measures. The first three levels are generally considered to be "acceptable" and are often combined.

Approximately 145 lane miles of major roadway (collector and above) are planned to be built and added to the region's roadway network between 2020 and 2050, as identified in the 2050 MTP. If these improvements are made, levels of service will remain roughly the same with some slippage in the C category and even into the D category.

As noted, the second way of measuring roadway congestion is the volume-to-capacity ratio method. To determine the efficiency of a road, the volume can be used in conjunction with the design and engineering characteristics of a road (capacity) in order to determine how efficiently vehicular traffic flows, known as the volume-to-capacity (V/C) ratio. The lower the V/C ratio, the more hypothetically efficient traffic flow is on that road.<sup>xiii</sup> According to a V/C analysis conducted by the MPO, all roadway segments that were measured were under capacity and 98.2 percent of intersections were under capacity in 2015. Five intersections were near capacity and five were at capacity.

Looking out to 2040, the V/C ratio for both roadways and intersections should remain stable. For the most part, congestions gets worse near major interchanges as expected.

## Roadway Safety

One of the most important components of Rockford's transportation network is the safety of those traveling on our region's roadways. Regardless of their mode of travel, residents and visitors should have equal access to well-designed and maintained system that reduces the risk of harm resulting from crashes or dangerous situations on roads, structures, and multi-modal facilities. Transportation safety is a very data-driven process requiring examination at both a system-wide and site-specific level that results in a number of measurable metrics including the number, severity, and type of crashes.

A review of IDOT's city Summary Crash Data shows that Rockford had an average of 3,975 crashes annually between 2014 and 2019. From 2014 to 2018, the city had a year over year growth in the number of crashes, with the exception of 2017 when the number stayed relatively the same as the 2016 number (approximately 4,090). In 2018, the city had a spike with 4,223 total crashes. However, by 2019 the number of crashes had dropped to 3,919.

The majority of crashes (78.5 percent) that occurred in 2019 only resulted in property damage. Unfortunately, this means that the remaining crashes (21.5 percent) resulted in either an injury or fatality. Any number of crash-



es that result in a loss of life is one too many. In 2019, approximately 0.4 percent of crashes resulted in fatality, with 14 individuals killed, and 21.1 percent resulted in 1,299 individuals being injured.

In addition to the number and severity of crashes, IDOT provides several crash characteristics to assist in the traffic safety analysis, including the type of crash. The type of crash is either based on the type of object the primary vehicle first makes contact with in a collision or the movement of the vehicle. In 2019, the five most common types of crashes in Rockford were front-to-rear end collisions (27.1 percent), turning movement (21.6 percent), angle or sideswipe (16.5 percent), collisions with a parked motor vehicle (11.0 percent), and a collision with a fixed object (8.9 percent). The types of crash resulting in the highest number of individuals who were injured were turning (318 individuals), angle (311 individuals), and front-to-rear (222 individuals). However, front-to-rear crashes did not result in as many severe injuries as angle or turning crashes had.

Looking at the percent of crashes resulting in fatalities or injuries, crashes involving pedestrians or bicyclists were ranked at the top. The majority of these crashes have occurred along East State Street and Charles Street. These statistics highlight the importance of ensuring the safety of the most vulnerable users of roadways, those that walk, when planning for and implementing transportation projects. The city is working to address this issue by building safer roadways and incorporating complete streets policies to ensure that the safety of all modes of travel are taken into account when planners and engineers construct new roadways and corridors.

While traffic crashes occur throughout the city, several corridors and intersections have a higher density of crashes, particularly those resulting in a fatality or injury. A high number of crashes resulting in a fatality have occurred along North Second Street/IL-251 (between Auburn Street and Walnut Street), as well as along South Main Street/IL-2 (between West State Street and 15th Avenue) and East State Street (near Alpine Road). Crashes resulting in a severe injury have occurred mostly in downtown Rockford on the east side of the river. More recently, East State Street has been an area of both concern and investment in pedestrian facilities and amenities.

## Public Transportation

Transit service is irreplaceable for the area's transit dependent population. This usually includes low income individuals, the elderly, citizens with disabilities, those too young to have a driver's license, people who have lost their driver's license, and countless others who are disenfranchised from the auto-oriented system. Many of these individuals' circumstances do not allow them to drive as they may not be able to drive, cannot safely drive, do not like to drive, or do not have access to an automobile. Disruption of public transit service would create tremendous hardship for these people and result in loss of jobs and lower access to health care, as well as cause other rippling effects throughout the community. Continuation of reliable, safe public transit is vital to the overall quality of life of the community as a whole (MTP).

### Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD)

Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD) is dedicated to providing safe, efficient, affordable, dependable, and accessible transportation to the residents of Rockford and the surrounding area. For nearly 50 years, RMTD has provided federally-subsidized and coordinated, fixed-route transit services for the Rockford Urbanized Area. A three-person board, appointed by the City of Rockford, oversees the operations and policies of RMTD and is empowered through the Downstate Transportation Act of 1971. Rockford Mass Transit District is funded through a combination of Federal, State, and local subsidies or contractual payments.

### Service

Rockford Mass Transit District provides fixed-route and complimentary origin-destination paratransit services within Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park and Belvidere, and contracts the Boone County Council on Aging (BCCA) to provide demand-response service to the urbanized portions of Boone County. In total, RMTD's service area covers 150 square miles and approximately 287,300 of the region's residents.

Transit services provided by RMTD include 19 daily fixed-routes (Monday through Saturday), six weeknight routes, and five Sunday routes. Most fixed-route services are provided on a hub-and-spoke radial operation pattern originating from the Downtown Transfer Center in Rockford. Of the 19 routes, 12 operate from the downtown transfer center while five serve outlying areas and do not originate or terminate in downtown.<sup>xiv</sup> These five "external routes" serve the following areas:

Route #18 – Bell School originates from the East Side Transfer Center and travels to East Riverside Boulevard providing service to residences and medical facilities near I-90.

Route #19 – Cherryvale originates from the East Side Transfer Center and serves the Cherryvale Mall.

Route #20 – Alpine Crosstown Covers Alpine Road from the IL-173 Commercial Corridor to Rock Valley College -Jefferson High School.

Route #22 – North Second Street travels North on Second Street and then the surrounding neighborhoods from Landstrom Road to IL-173.

Route #24 – Belvidere originates from the East Side Transfer Center and travels along Business 20 and North State Street to provide access to the community of Belvidere.

General service hours include service to all municipalities during weekdays, service to Rockford, Loves Park, and Machesney Park on Saturdays, and only to certain areas of Rockford on Sundays. Services are not provided on Saturday and Sunday nights. Service to Cherryvale Mall, in the Village of Cherry Valley, is also provided during regular operating periods for an additional zone fare. Most fixed-routes run at 60 minute headways, with only two weekday routes (#2 School St and #11 East State) running every 30 minutes and another two weekday routes (#3 Huffman and #6 Kilburn) running every 90 minutes.

Additionally, RMTD provides complimentary origin-destination paratransit service at a minimum of three-quarters of a mile from their fixed-route system and where applicable. Ultimately, this extends the service area to the incorporated limits of Rockford, Machesney Park, Loves Park, and Belvidere. Paratransit services operate the same schedules as RMTD's fixed-route system. Although week-night fixed-route service is only available in Rockford, complimentary paratransit service is extended to 10:00 p.m. for Loves Park and Machesney Park.

Through service agreements, RMTD works with adjacent public transit agencies for demand-response services. Through an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with Boone County, RMTD subcontracts BCCA to provide demand-response service to the urbanized portions of the county. Similarly, an IGA exists with Stateline Mass Transit District (SMTD) for RMTD to operate demand-response service throughout Rockton and Roscoe townships, which lay adjacent to the northern portion of

RMTD's service area.

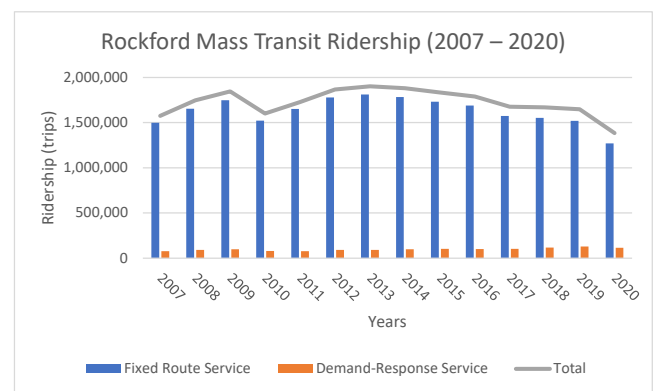
Starting Nov. 29, 2021 RMTD added an additional hour of service to the beginning of its core weekday routes and an additional hour of service at the end of all six night routes. The first runs of the day will start at 4:15 a.m. on core routes. Additionally, all six night routes will run until 12:15 a.m. and the late-night shuttle will run until 12:45 a.m. RMTD says this was the first of four major goals for improving the system identified as part of the RMTD Comprehensive Mobility Study.

While RMTD did not say what the next set of changes will be, they did say they will focus on improving weekend service hours and this was implemented in late February of 2022.

Additional phases of the service expansion and improvement initiative will require substantial resources and funding necessitating an extended timeline for implementation. These changes will be determined as part of the District's Fiscal Year 2023 budget discussions. These initiatives will be funded through a combination of state and federal funding sources.

## Ridership

In fiscal year 2019 (July 2018-June 2019), RMTD provided 1,647,978 unlinked trips across all of the services they operated. At 92 percent of all trips provided, RMTD's fixed-route service is the driving force for mass transportation in the region. However, over the last 10 years, RMTD has seen steady decreases in their fixed-route ridership, a trend seen nationwide. The following figures show RMTD ridership from 2007 to 2020 for both fixed-route and demand-response, and the 2019 Ridership by Fixed Route data.



Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD)

Transit Ridership by Route		
Route #	Number	Percent
1 - West State	82,953	6%
2- School Street	93,276	6%
3- Huffman	40,262	3%
4 - North Main	124,964	9%
5- Clifton	20,529	1%
6 - Kilburn	31,287	2%
7- South Main	55,437	4%
11- East State	293,675	20%
12 - Charles	73,345	5%
13 - Rural	18,547	1%
14 - 7th Street	78,851	5%
15 - Kishwaukee	75,196	5%
16/17 - City Loop	217,740	15%
18 - Bell School	3,386	0%
19 - Cherry Valley	12,707	1%
20 - Alpine Crosstown	49,858	3%
22 - North Second Street	34,939	2%
24 - Belvidere	2,236	0%
31 - Auburn/Rockton (Weeknights/Saturdays)	15,011	1%
32 - East State (Weeknights/Saturdays)	20,576	1%
33 - West State/Clifton (Weeknights/Saturdays)	14,453	1%
34 - Harrison/Alpine (Weeknights/Saturdays)	16,092	1%
35 - Kishwaukee/7th Street (Weeknights/Saturdays)	14,608	1%
36 - Perryville/Alpine (Weeknights/Saturdays)	7,617	1%
40 - East State Street (Sunday)	8,393	1%
41 - Auburn & Rockton (Sunday)	11,633	1%
42 - East State Street (Sunday)	7,653	1%
43 - W. State Street & Clifton (Sunday)	4,288	0%
44 - Harrison & Alpine (Sunday)	4,919	0%
45 - Kishwaukee & 7th Street (Sunday)	6,829	0%
Total	1,441,260	100%



RMTD Downtown Transfer Center



RMTD New Bus Shelter Design



RMTD Downtown Transfer Center

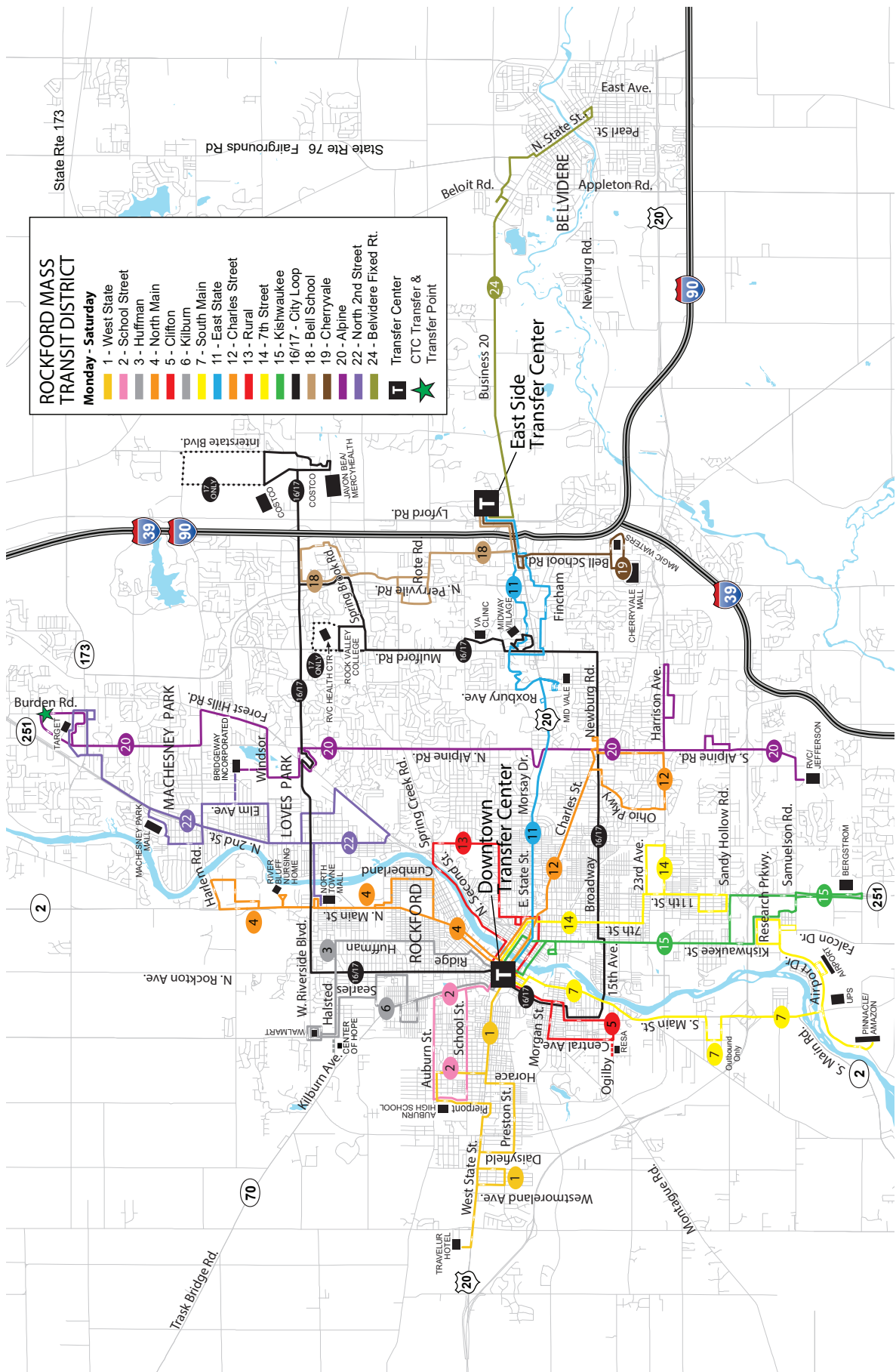
### Comprehensive Mobility Analysis

Since fall 2018, RMTD and Region 1 Planning Council have been collaborating on the Comprehensive Mobility Analysis, a multi-faceted approach to reviewing public transportation needs within the community to improve our investments.

The primary goal of the Comprehensive Mobility Analysis is to create an implementable plan that provides a roadmap for the

development of public transportation services in the region over the next five to ten years. Additionally, there was an internal analysis on the strengths and weaknesses of the current public transportation system. The study also placed an emphasis on direct feedback from both public and stakeholder organizations on their day-to-day transit needs. This analyses and feedback was then incorporated into a list of short and long term recommendations for the continued operation of RMTD services within the region, including the creation of a new baseline route network.





## Chicago Rockford International Airport

As the 19th busiest airport in the country for freight traffic, the Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) clearly plays a key role in the community's economy. The airport itself is located in the southwest quadrant of Rockford and encompasses over 3,000 acres, 800 of which include the airfield. RFD is an independent municipal corporation and operated by the Greater Rockford Airport Authority (GRAA). The GRAA is led by a Board of Commissioners with seven members appointed by the elected officials of Loves Park, Machesney Park, Rockford, and Winnebago County.

In 2018, the Chicago Rockford International Airport was named the fastest growing airport for cargo in the world, growing by 56.6 percent.<sup>xv</sup> Contributing to its success as one of the fastest growing cargo airports in the world is its status as a United States Customs Port of Entry and Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) #176. The Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) program creates a partnership between American businesses and the federal government, increasing the global market share of U.S. businesses and therefore retaining or creating more local jobs.<sup>xvi</sup>

The City of Rockford has not lost sight of the critical role that freight plays at the airport and in the economy. The city needs to continue to evaluate how it can capitalize on the location and infrastructure already in place to build on the freight traffic going through RFD on an annual basis. With continuing congestion problems at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, RFD has great potential to continue to grow as the freight logistics hub of the Midwest. The city looks to continue to support the airport to strengthen its position as a worldwide leader in freight transportation.

While the airport has mainly had its focus on cargo and freight, it also has great potential to increase passenger flights. The airport has the capability of boarding almost a million passengers a year, with a modern terminal facility, ample parking, and a highway system that serves it. The airport's passenger services are provided by Allegiant and now has non-stop service to Destin, Ft. Myers, Orlando, Sarasota, and Tampa Florida, as well as Las Vegas, Nevada and Phoenix, Arizona. Efforts are currently being made to expand service beyond this. Passenger traffic spiked by more than 35% at the Chicago Rockford International Airport during the first six months of 2022 compared to the same period a 2021. Airport officials said 64,578 people flew out of RFD from Jan. 1 through June 30, 2022 compared to 47,743 enplanements during the first half of 2021.



RFD Passenger Dropoff and Arrivals

The GRAA, Greater Rockford Growth Partnership (GRGP), and members of the local business community need to continue to work together to raise the profile of RFD in Washington D.C., Springfield, and corporate offices of airlines throughout the country.<sup>xvii</sup>

### Passenger & Freight Rail

Rail transportation, both in terms of passenger and freight, provides the region with promising opportunities for economic development, job creation, and return on investment. Just over 56 miles of railroad track exists within the city, all of which only serve freight.

#### Passenger Rail Service

Rockford's last regularly scheduled passenger rail service, Amtrak, ended operations several decades ago. While attempts have been made since then to reintroduce passenger service to Rockford, none of them were successful. However, in the last few years, these efforts have gained momentum again when Governor J.B. Pritzker passed the 2019 Rebuild Illinois Capital Plan. This capital plan provided \$275 million for all facets of the project, including rail stations in Rockford and Belvidere. For passenger rail to return to Rockford, plans must be in place that outline how the system will operate within the community and

region as a whole. If properly planned for passenger rail and the location of the stations could be an important economic development incentive for additional growth opportunities in the future.

There are currently two studies under development that are addressing these needs. The first study for the Chicago-Rockford intercity passenger rail service, funded under the 2019 Rebuild Illinois Capital Plan, is being written by IDOT. This study focuses on the potential alignment, operations, and ridership of the service. Part of the discussion has been centered on the connection of the passenger rail service to METRA's commuter service. This project, if successful, will enable Rockford to not only provide a convenient way to travel to and from Chicago, but will also allow Rockford to increase marketing opportunities to existing and potential employers and employees in a manner that could not be achieved in the past.

In conjunction with the IDOT study, Region 1 Planning Council (R1PC) has been working with Rockford and Belvidere to conduct a passenger rail station siting analysis. The study is a comprehensive planning initiative to evaluate the most feasible and viable locations for the two passenger rail stations in the Rockford Region, one in each city's downtown. This planning effort included an in-depth needs assessment of stations, focusing on siting, conceptual design, multi-modal connectivity, and economic development growth potential surrounding the two potential sites.

### **Freight Rail Service**

Four rail companies currently provide rail service to and through Rockford, including the Canadian National, with its through line from Chicago to Omaha, Nebraska with several industrial spurs; the Union Pacific, from Chicago to Rockford with a spur to Loves Park; Illinois Railway, a short-line from Rockford to Rochelle; and the Canadian Pacific, operating between Janesville and its east-west main line in Davis Junction, sharing the Illinois Railway bridge over the Rock River and track to Davis Junction.

A Railroad Consolidation Study for the City of Rockford identifies several strategies to free-up rail corridors, rail yards, and bridges over the Rock River for other land uses through rail consolidation. In 2021, this study is being re-evaluated as a part of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Freight Study for the Rockford Region. If the city is successful in implementing the recommendations of this study, there will be two railroad bridges, a five-mile long rail corridor, and two rail yards near downtown available for redevelopment.

## **Active Transportation**

Nearly everyone is a pedestrian at some point throughout the day if they need to travel anywhere. Whether it's to walk from their car to their office or a store, between bus stops, between their home and place of employment, or along neighborhood sidewalks for an evening stroll. Everyone who leaves their home has to walk or wheelchair for at least a short distance at some point during the day. For that reason, how the city provides for active transportation, such as walking or bicycling, is of critical importance. The needs of pedestrians, as well as other non-motorized means of transportation, should be accommodated and planned for with the same importance as automotive traffic is.

The goals identified in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan remain true today. These goals define the methods in which Rockford can strive to make walking and biking trips in the region more accessible, convenient, safe, and enjoyable for all users and with all abilities.

**The following policies have been identified as important and align with the city's adopted Complete Streets Policy:**

- Providing a physical environment that encourages walking through its location, design and maintenance, provides convenient, accessible, safe, and enjoyable pedestrian travel. Planners should take into account how the land use, street patterns, and site design impact pedestrian travel.
- Developing and implementing, in conjunction with the Rockford Park District and the Rockford School District, education programs that improve pedestrian safety and promote awareness of pedestrian transportation issues and the benefits of walking.
- Encouraging the perception of streets as community space, not just the domain of motorized vehicles.
- Encouraging good design to enhance the feel and look of the pedestrian environment. The pedestrian environment includes open spaces such as plazas and courtyards, as well as the building facades that give shape to the street. Amenities, such as street furniture, banners, art, plantings and special paving, along with historical elements and cultural references, should promote a sense of place.
- Enforcing laws and regulations guiding the interaction between pedestrians and motorists. Conduct a pedestrian



an crosswalk right-of-way enforcement campaign. In the future installing cameras at problem intersections to catch drivers running red lights or committing other infractions that endanger pedestrians could be an options.

- Completing a comprehensive survey of the city's sidewalk system to determine where the gaps are as a preliminary step to preparing a CIP for sidewalks. Initial attention should be paid to arterial and collector level streets, to public streets in the areas surrounding public and private schools, and to enable people who ride the bus to get to their bus stop safely. Once the survey is complete, missing sidewalk segments should be prioritized.

- Consider reconstructing or constructing sidewalks at the same time the adjacent street is rebuilt or resurfaced, especially when the sidewalk would be beneficial to meeting complete streets objectives.

In addition to sidewalks, the city has been pursuing an extensive system of existing and proposed bicycle facilities since 2008. The city plans on continuing this work through the bikeway network recommendations identified in the most recent City of Rockford Bikeway Implementation Plan, 2020.

To accomplish all of the above, this plan endorses and encourages pedestrian and non-motorized means of transportation and the continued development and expansion of the city's system of sidewalks, bikeways, and pathways. This pedestrian system has great value. It reduces trip demand on the highway and bus systems. It provides a means of exercise and a way to relieve mental stress. It has significant recreational/leisure value. It provides a means of safe transportation for children and adults alike who are disenfranchised from the automobile-oriented system. It is pollution-free. It contributes to overall aesthetics, appearance and livability of the community. This plan endorses the sidewalk, bikeway, and pathway plans and recommendations of the City of Rockford's Bikeway Implementation Plan, adopted by the City Council on September 20, 2020, and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Rockford Region, adopted by the MPO Policy Committee in 2017.

**The city has identified the following guidelines and recommendations for bicycle facilities:**

- Consider both on-road and off-road improvements.
- Narrowing lane width to 11-ft or 10-ft will be considered if necessary to implement an on-road lane on local roads

with lower speed and lower or no truck traffic.

- Where on-road bikeways are recommended, try to achieve a bicycle level-of-service (BLOS) rating of B or better for designation in the network – with high-C marginally acceptable if there are no other options. BLOS “B” is an appropriate goal for accommodating the casual adult bicyclist.

- Use wayfinding and route designation signs to indicate where the bicycle network is for users, and to alert drivers of the possible presence of bicyclists.

- For the on-road segments designated as being in the network, raise the priority of filling sidewalk or sidepath gaps on at least one side of the road. This recognizes that children – and more traffic-intolerant adults – will ride on the sidewalk. However, sidewalks with a width under sidepath standards should not be designated or marked as part of the bikeway network. A sidepath is defined as a off street bike path that is between the widths of a sidewalk and a shared-use path.

- Only in special cases should sidepaths be recommended where there are too many crossing conflicts (driveways, entrances, cross streets) or where residential front yards will be impacted.

- Where sidepaths are recommended, use the design techniques described above to help to reduce the risks at intersections.

- Where there is sufficient width and need, and speeds are moderate to low, use striping to improve on-road cyclist comfort level.

- Use shared lane marking and bike signal actuation pavement markings to indicate proper on-road bicycle position, especially where heavy bicycle traffic is expected.

**Following the Complete Streets Policy the city will measure the success of the policy, and report annually, on the following key performance measures, related to active transportation:**

- Linear feet of new or reconstructed sidewalk (publicly or privately built),
- Linear feet of new or reconstructed multi-use paths (publicly or privately built),
- Miles of new or re-striped bike routes,



- Number of new or reconstructed curb ramps,
- Number of new or re-stripped crosswalks,
- Number of new or replaced pedestrian signals,
- Number of walk to school programs initiated,
- And rate of children walking or bicycling to school.



West State Street Phase 2 Reconstruction - Opened Fall 2022

# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

### Upgrade and modernize streets, bridges and traffic control infrastructure to ensure a high level of service and safety

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to bury overhead utilities underground with planned infrastructure improvements and new developments where applicable	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
Continue using City streetscape lighting standards and invest in more street furniture (i.e., benches, bus shelters, street wayfinding signs) within business districts and along major commercial corridors	\$\$	Short	High

### Improve road, rail, and air network to enhance the airports movement of people and goods

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to work on attracting new business to the Global Trade Park	\$	Medium	Medium
Implement remaining improvements to U.S. Bypass 20 for interstate level of service improvements to increase freight transportation efficiency	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue pursuing Downtown Passenger Rail Service Station Planning with the goal of developing a future passenger rail service to and from Chicago	\$\$\$\$	Short	Medium

### Coordinate land-use decisions with existing and planned transportation assets to increase transportation choices, access to jobs, goods, and services

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Promote mixed use development and walkability near major local and regional transit centers	\$	Short	Medium
Continue to promote Planned Unit Developments (PUD's) near public transportation options	\$\$	Short	High

### Improve and expand transportation connectivity between neighborhoods and major employment centers

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Implement express bus routes to reduce travel times and attract riders	\$\$	Medium	Low
Promote and attract riders for the Van Galder Bus service with rides to Amtrak service line to increase the number of interregional trips	\$\$	Medium	Low
RMTD should continue real-time transit information systems and applications	\$	Long	Medium
Support regional efforts to grow commuter rail initiatives to promote daily trips between Rockford and the Chicago metropolitan area	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to install new sidewalk along roadway improvement projects, especially major corridors where pedestrian facilities do not currently exist	\$\$\$	Long	High



Continue to keep bikes in mind and that bike connections are an important facet or urban planning	\$	Long	Medium
Coordinate with other government entities for sidewalk improvements between municipalities	\$	Long	Medium
Rock Valley College (RVC) transportation could be better advertised with clearer route, and service information	\$	Long	Low
Develop a local, volunteer-based rideshare program that could possibly be city lead, or through the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau	\$	Medium	Low
Continue to promote additional bike racks (included in zoning ordinance) and electric vehicle charging stations in new parking lots	\$	Short	Medium
<b>Continue to implement a complete streets policy</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to implement complete streets policies on new corridor/roadway improvements, especially downtown and high pedestrian shopping areas that link to residential areas	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
Ensure adequate space for multiple users of the street network (pedestrians, bikes, cars, buses, and scooters)	\$	Medium	High
Training/education (possibly in the form of a PSA) for drivers without experience around on-street bikers	\$	Short	Medium
Develop a public service announcement on traffic safety for bicycles, possibly in coordination with the Rockford Police Department. Provide information to the public about 3ft rule, not parking in bike lanes, dangers of hitting a parked car door being opened, shared responsibility for bike safety, and how to pass carefully	\$	Short	High
Be aware when installing flashing yellow turn signals how they affect bicycle movements and safety	\$	Short	High
<b>Improve pedestrian connections and safety across major right-of-ways</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue filling in key gaps in sidewalk network	\$\$\$	Long	High
Continue to construct mid-block marked crosswalks where possible and feasible to improve safety	\$	Long	High
City has done excellent job along N/S Main, Continue filling gaps along E. State	\$\$\$	Long	High
<b>Maintain and expand on and off-street networks servicing pedestrians and bicyclists</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue filling in key gaps in sidewalk network	\$\$\$	Long	High
Continue to identify key locations to implement bike racks and bike stations	\$	Medium	Low
Continue to work to improve pedestrian access between schools and neighborhoods	\$	Short	High

Continue supporting, and being advocates for, bike share and scooter rental programs	\$	Short	Medium
Continue to study possibilities of more East-West connections for bike and pedestrian facilities to connect downtown to areas on Alpine Road	\$\$	Short	High
Update Bike and Pedestrian Plan to increase current system and to finish logical connections that still need to be completed	\$\$\$	Short	High
RMTD bike racks should be on all buses and plan for e-scooters on buses as they gain popularity	\$	Short	High
<b>Improve mass transit services including public transit buses, paratransit buses, and other options</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue and increase current transit level services through funding	\$\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue exploring options in developing passenger and commuter rail	\$\$\$\$	Short	High
Continue to explore the feasibility of extending the RMTD service area and routes while also looking to reduce overall travel times to reduce long headways. Identify where the greatest route needs are and focus on those service areas first	\$\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue to incorporate bypass ramps, turnouts, and bus stop protection into new projects	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue to work with RMTD and RPC to facilitate more Electric or hybrid bus options in the future, with the goal of a full fleet transfer to cleaner energy use	\$\$	Short	Low
Increase frequency of use at RMTD Lyford Road transfer center	\$\$	Short	Low

## Chapter Endnotes

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- v “National Highway System.” U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration, June 29, 201
- vi Illinois Department of Transportation Bureau of Local Roads and Streets. “IDOT Bureau of Local Roads and Streets Manual”. Springfield, IL:, 2018
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- ix Donnell, Eric T., Scott C. Hines, Kevin M. Mahoney, Richard J. Porter, Hugh McGee. “Speed Concepts: Informational Guide”. U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration, 2009
- x [https://rockfordil.gov/wp-content/uploads/serviceaccount/11thStreetCorridor/11th\\_Street\\_Corridor\\_Study\\_\(Full\).pdf](https://rockfordil.gov/wp-content/uploads/serviceaccount/11thStreetCorridor/11th_Street_Corridor_Study_(Full).pdf)
- xi <https://rockfordil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Auburn-Street-Corridor-Study-FINAL-compressed.pdf>
- xii “Traffic Data Computation Method: Pocket Guide.” U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration, August 2018
- xiii 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for the Rockford Region. Region 1 Planning Council, 2020
- xiv <https://rmtd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RMTD-Schedule-Book-2019-Mon-Sat-Map-Proof-002.pdf>
- xv “World’s Top Five Fastest Growing Airports for Passengers and Cargo Revealed.” ACI World, September 16, 2019. <https://aci.aero/news/2019/09/17/worlds-top-five-fastest-growing-airports-for-passengers-and-cargo-revealed/>
- xvi Greater Rockford Airport Authority, Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Budget and Appropriations Ordinance, (Rockford, IL: 2019)
- xvii <https://www.rrstar.com/story/business/travel/2022/08/15/rockford-airport-air-travel-up-by-35-percent-in-2022/65398587007/>





# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE

## Introduction & Background

Economic development can mean different things to different people. Generally speaking, anything a community does to foster and create wealth through the development of a healthy economy can fall under the definition of economic development. From the public's perspective, local economic development may involve the allocation of local (limited) resources such as land, labor, capital, and education in a way that has a positive effect on business activity, income distribution, employment, fiscal sustainability, and financial health. Economic development is a targeted approach implemented by the responsible governing bodies in a region to influence the direction of private sector investment towards those opportunities that can lead to sustained economic growth over time. It's important to note that economic development and community development are different. Community development is the planning process for making somewhere a better place to live and work. Economic development is based on the creation of wealth for which a community will see the benefits gained from increased economic activity.

## Workforce Characteristics

Understanding the socioeconomic characteristics of the community's residents is essential in planning for our region's future because it influences a wide range of topics, including land use, housing, transportation, education, and community infrastructure. Workforce characteristics in particular can have a large impact on a city's overall economic health. One of the key components in determining a city's economic health is the number of individuals with-

in the labor force. The labor force is the sum of all employed and unemployed persons who are actively engaged in the workforce. The workforce, on the other hand, is the employed portion of the total labor force. The difference between the two indicates the unemployment rate and the overall quality of the local economy.

The City of Rockford, and its surrounding neighbors, have experienced periods of labor force loss and recovery over the past few decades that closely mimic national trends and population migration numbers. For instance, the overall population of individuals 16 years or older within the city decreased by 3.8 percent between 2010 and 2019. This decrease could explain recent declines in the city's labor force, which had a 2.9 percent reduction between 2010 and 2019. While the overall number of individuals in the labor force has decreased, the percentage of people in the labor force compared to the total population has remained stable, with 61.2 percent in 2010 compared to 61.7 percent in 2019.

*NOTE: Armed Forces (active duty) labor statistics account for where individuals live while enlisted*

Labor Force	2010		2019	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Civilian labor force	72,718	61%	70,665	62%
Armed Forces	49		25	
Not in labor force	46,141	39%	43,748	38%
Population 16 years and over	118,908		114,438	

*U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year ACS estimates. DP03*

Another workforce characteristic used to measure a city’s economic health is per capita income. Per capita income is calculated by dividing the total income earned during a given period of time by the total population. Per capita income provides a context for the standard of living in an area. However, per capita income does not represent the disparities among the different income levels within a community. The city’s per capita income has increased by 19.1 percent between 2010 and 2019 from \$21,422 per person to \$25,517 per person. While the city’s per capita income has increased, it still lags behind the national and state per capita income of \$34,103 and \$36,038, respectively.

Employment Characteristics

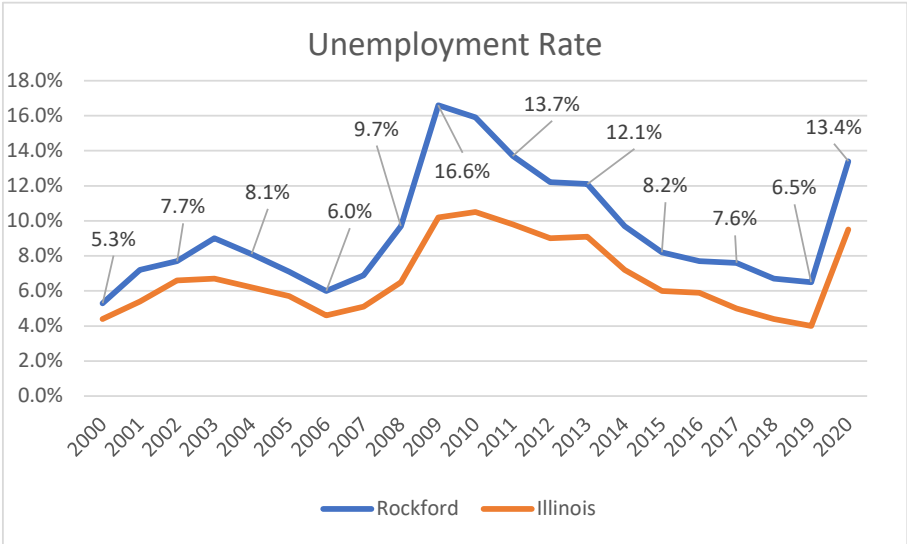
In addition to the number of residents in the workforce and per capita income, it is important to understand other employment characteristics for the regions population. This would include unemployment rates, high-employment industries, and commuting patterns of individuals. The following section provides a summary of these characteristics.

Per Capita Income	2010		2019	
Rockford	\$21,422		\$25,517	
Illinois	\$28,782		\$36,038	
United States	\$27,334		\$34,103	

U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year ACS estimates. S0801

Current Characteristics

Overall, Rockford has seen stable employment numbers for the population 16 years and over when comparing the 2010 and 2019 numbers, which only show a decrease of 1.7 percent. However, unemployment levels from year-over-year in Rockford have not been as stable, instead rates have reflected the economic climate of the nation as one would expect. As shown in the figure to the left the unemployment rate has consistently been above the state average since 1990. The city’s unemployment rate peaked in 2009 at 16.6 percent. Since this time, it has been on a gradual downward trend with annual unemployment rates at 6.5 percent in 2019, the lowest rate in some time.<sup>1</sup> However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on employment during 2020 when the unemployment rate skyrocketed to 13.4 percent. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the rate has since fallen back to 6.5 percent as of July 2022.



City of Rockford				
Year	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
2010	72,101	60,729	11,372	15.8%
2011	70,646	60,977	9,669	13.7%
2012	69,815	61,354	8,461	12.1%
2013	68,403	60,114	8,289	12.1%
2014	67,577	61,105	6,472	9.6%
2015	67,523	62,015	5,508	8.2%
2016	67,110	61,914	5,196	7.7%
2017	66,109	61,052	5,057	7.6%
2018	67,055	62,618	4,437	6.5%
2019	66,533	62,019	4,514	6.8%
2020	.	.	.	13.4%

U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year ACS estimates. DP03

Representative of its industrial heritage, manufacturing continues to comprise the largest employment sector in Rockford employing 22 percent of the labor force in 2019. Healthcare and social services are the second largest employment sector containing 16 percent of the total employment. This is followed by retail trade at 12 percent. Tied for the 3rd and 4th highest employment sectors are professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services at 10 percent, and arts entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services also at 10 percent.

Employment by Industry (2019)		
	Number	Percent
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	63,083	-
Manufacturing	13,867	22%
Health care and social assistance	10,082	16%
Retail trade	7,291	12%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management	6,571	10%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	6,321	10%
Educational services	3,666	6%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3,409	5%
Other services, except public administration	3,258	5%
Construction	2,753	4%
Finance and insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	2,076	3%
Public administration	1,440	2%
Wholesale trade	1,304	2%
Information	890	1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining	155	0%

U.S. Census Bureau 2010 & 2019: 5-Year ACS estimates, S2405

The following table lists the top twenty employers in the region, many of which employ Rockford residents.<sup>ii</sup>

All but one of the top five employers in the region are located within the City of Rockford, as of January 2022. Rockford Public Schools are the largest employer in the region, employing approximately 4,075 individuals. With healthcare being one of the leading employment industries in the city the top three regional healthcare systems hold the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th ranked major employer spots, with UW Health (formerly Swedish American Health System), employing 3,780 workers, MercyHealth employing 3,000 individuals, and OSF Healthcare employing a total of 2,200 people (all numbers are estimates as they fluctuate regularly). It is important to note that workers at these three employers are spread throughout the city at various schools, facilities, and clinics. The regions 5th largest employer is a three-way tie between Collins Aerospace, UPS and Woodward, all with an estimated 2,000 employees. Woodward is located in Loves Park.

Commuting patterns of residents and employees is tracked by the U.S. Census at the county level. Commuting pattern data from 2015 (the most recent data available) shows that the majority of people who live in Winnebago County also work within the county (83.2 percent). Winnebago County residents also commute to a number of neighbor-

Top 20 Employers in the Rockford Region (January 2022)		
Company	Industry	Employees
Rockford Public Schools - RPS205	Education	4,075
UW Health (Formerly SwedishAmerican Health)	Healthcare	3,780
Mercyhealth	Healthcare	3,000
OSF Healthcare	Healthcare	2,200
Collins Aerospace	Aerospace Manufacturing	2,000
Woodward	Aerospace Manufacturing	2,000
UPS	Logistics & Distribution	2,000
Amazon	Logistics & Distribution	1,535
Wal-Mart Stores	Retail	1,470
Stellantis (Formerly Fiat Chrysler Auto)	Manufacturing	1,459
Winnebago County	Government	1,429
Harlem Consolidated Schools	Education	1,147
Lowe's	Distribution Center, Retail	1,110
City of Rockford	Government	1,102
Belvidere Community Unit Schools	Education	950
Magna	Auto Parts Manufacturing	816
General Mills/Green Giant	Cereal/Snack Bars	650
Syncreon	Automotive Supplier	600
Taylor Company	Ice Cream Machines	500
Bergstrom, Inc.	Manufacturing	400

Source: Rockford Area Economic Development Council and City of Rockford

ing counties for work. This include 5 percent of residents commuting to Boone County and 3.2 percent commuting north to Rock County, Wisconsin.

Commuting Flows - 2015 Live in Winnebago County		
County of Employment	Number	Percent
Winnebago	107,104	83%
Boone	6,395	5%
Rock, WI	4,074	3%
All Other Counties	2,285	2%
Cook	1,755	1%
Ogle	1,646	1%
McHenry	1,409	1%
Dekalb	1,092	1%
Stephenson	1,088	1%
Kane	1,030	1%
Dupage	496	0%
Lake	159	0%
Lee	119	0%
Will	56	0%
Total	128,708	100%

Source: U.S. Census 2011-2015 ACS Commuter Flow



Conversely, a large number of workers are commuting to Winnebago County from outside for employment, making up 20.2 percent of all workers in the county. Most workers commuting to Winnebago County are traveling from adjacent counties, including Boone County (6.7 percent), Ogle County (3.8 percent), and Rock County, Wisconsin (3.2 percent).

Commuting Flows - 2015 Work in Winnebago County		
County of Residence	Number	Percent
Winnebago	107,104	80%
Boone	8,960	7%
Ogle	5,117	4%
Rock, Wi	4,313	3%
All Other Counties	2,223	2%
Stephenson	2,157	2%
McHenry	1,250	1%
DeKalb	1,056	1%
Cook	845	1%
Kane	613	0%
Lee	261	0%
Lake	160	0%
Dupage	112	0%
Will	57	0%
Total	128,708	100%

Source: U.S. Census 2011-2015 ACS Commuter Flow

The average commute travel time for workers 16 years or older is 21 minutes (Winnebago Co). While driving alone to work is still the most common mode of transportation (78.9 percent), Rockford has seen an increase in workers traveling to work using other modes of transportation such as carpooling, public transportation, walking, biking, and working from home. Carpooling and public transit saw the highest increases of workers using them as their primary mode of transportation to work between

2010 and 2019, with an increase of 20.4 percent and 19.6 percent, respectively. In 2019, an estimated 3.3 percent of workers worked from home; however, this number may see a significant increase in the coming years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commute to Work	2010		2019	
Mode	Trips	Percent	Trips	Percent
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	51,250	82%	48,886	79%
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	6,381	10%	7,684	12%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	999	2%	1,195	2%
Walked	1,230	2%	1,246	2%
Other means	931	1%	896	1%
Worked from home	1,818	3%	2,028	3%
Workers 16 years and over	62,609	-	61,935	-
Mean travel time to work (minutes)				
	21		21	

Source: U.S. Census 2011-2015 ACS Commuter Flow

## Population & Employment Projections

Rockford's future population is anticipated to remain stable out to the year 2040 with a slight increase in its population and employment totals. These projections are important in anticipating the potential needs of the community moving forward. To study this data, three projection scenarios have been developed: a baseline scenario, a one percent growth scenario, and a one percent decline scenario. The following summaries highlight these projections which have been completed at the county-level using the Regional Economic Modeling Inc. (REMI) Software.

The baseline scenario shows that the population would initially dip, followed by slight increase from 283,003 to 293,820 (an increase of 10,817) by 2040; for an overall growth of 3.8 percent. If Winnebago County continued to grow at its baseline levels, by 2040 employment is estimated to increase by 4,309 employees. Looking at specific



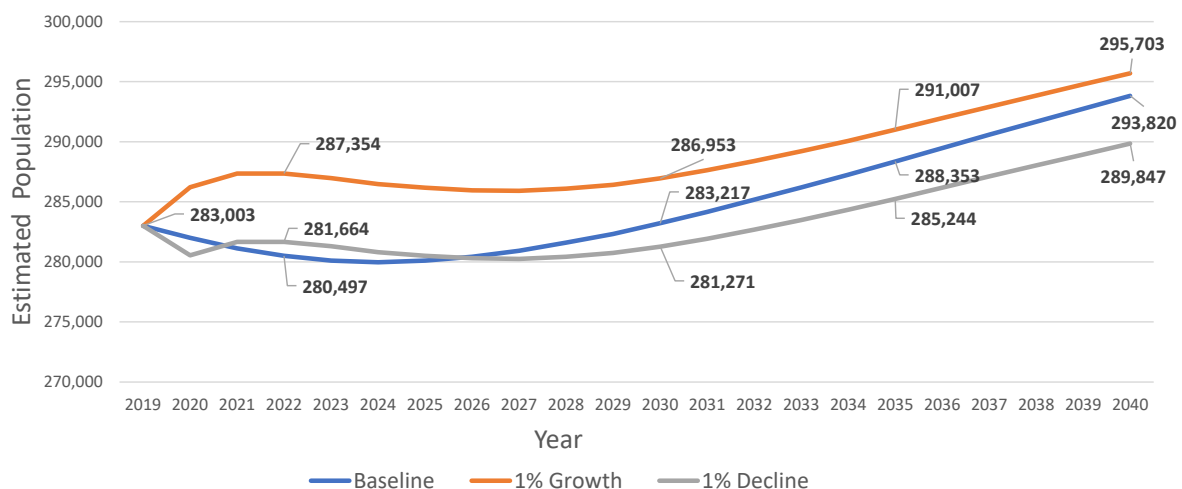
Downtown Rockford Central Business District - Looking West

employment growth by industry shows that manufacturing, retail and wholesale, and government sectors will likely see decreases. In contrast, the service and finance industries are predicted to see an increase in employment numbers.

Using a one percent growth projection, the population would increase within the first few years, followed by a short period of declining population, and eventually rising to 295,703 by 2040; for an overall population growth of 4.4 percent. For employment, there will be an increase of 4,691 employees by 2040; however, the industries in which employment is located will shift. The largest changes will be in the retail and wholesale and transportation, and public utilities industries, which will see a decline in their employment numbers, while the service industry is predicted to have a significant increase.

Although a one percent decline in population is used in the third scenario, the projections still show some growth over the next 20 years and follows a similar pattern as the previous scenario, just at a slower rate. In this scenario, the population would only grow to 289,847 by 2040, an increase of 2.4 percent. In this scenario, the baseline employment value starts well below the other scenarios but by 2040 it still lags behind by about a total of 1,000 individuals. Many of these jobs may shift to individuals who commute to the county for work instead. Like the other two scenarios, manufacturing, retail, and wholesale industries would experience a decline, while the service, construction, transportation and public utilities, and government industries are predicted to see the most significant increase in employment numbers.

**Population Forecast Estimates (2019 - 2040)**



Employment Forecasts (2019 - 2040)	Baseline		1% Growth		1% Decline	
	2019	2040	2019	2040	2019	2040
Natural Resources	317	367	320	381	319	380
Construction	5,861	5,869	6,038	6,252	5,886	6,192
Manufacturing	24,461	21,298	24,466	22,182	24,440	22,135
Retail and Wholesale	22,933	21,615	23,034	21,740	22,875	21,566
Transportation and Public Utilities	9,151	9,364	9,218	9,292	9,186	9,253
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	11,133	12,096	11,141	11,133	11,081	11,067
Services	74,446	82,591	73,907	81,674	73,458	81,106
Government	14,986	14,326	15,148	15,213	14,924	15,037
Farm	776	846	780	876	780	876
All Industries	164,065	168,374	164,052	168,743	162,949	167,611

Source: Region 1 Planning Council, R1PC Data

## Business & Industry Characteristics

Several other factors contribute to the economic health of the city. However, these factors go beyond the workforce within the city and instead focus on the business and industrial characteristics of the city. These characteristics center on industries contributing to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employment of the region.

Gross Domestic Product 2019 (County)	GDP (1000s)	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	\$4,270	0%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	\$1,231	0%
Utilities	\$196,161	1%
Construction	\$515,614	3%
Manufacturing	\$3,503,334	23%
Wholesale trade	\$815,572	5%
Retail trade	\$966,115	6%
Transportation and warehousing	\$432,402	3%
Information	\$344,897	2%
Finance and insurance	\$1,340,791	9%
Real estate and rental and leasing	\$1,927,876	13%
Professional and business services	\$919,456	6%
Educational services	\$90,345	1%
Health care and social assistance	\$1,930,151	13%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	\$111,911	1%
Accommodation and food services	\$401,073	3%
Other services (except government and government enterprises)	\$366,480	2%
Government and government enterprises	\$1,346,952	9%
All Industry Total	\$15,214,631 Billion	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, BLS 2019

The first factor, or measure, of the city's economic health is gross domestic product (GDP). Gross domestic product is the value of the goods and services produced in an area. Tracking how much the GDP increased or decreased over time highlights how the local economy is performing. This is measured by industry, and is generated quarterly and annually at the county-level to determine each industry's performance and its contributions to the overall economy.

In 2019, the overall GDP produced in Winnebago County was about \$15.2 billion dollars. The top industry contributing to the county's GDP was manufacturing, making up 23 percent of the overall GDP (\$3.5 billion). Healthcare and real estate came in as the second and third most impactful industries contributing to GDP at approximately

13 percent each, or approximately \$1.93 billion each. Other industries with large shares of the GDP were government and finance. In 2019, the City of Rockford's GDP was 16.7 million dollars.

Freight Dependent Sectors (2019)	Total Employment	Percent
Agriculture and Farming	147	1%
Mining	8	0%
Construction	2,753	9%
Manufacturing	13,867	48%
Wholesale Trade	1,304	4%
Retail Trade	7,291	25%
Transportation and Warehousing	3,409	12%
Utilities	352	1%
Total Employment	29,131	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019, 5-Year ACS, S2403

A large portion of the city's economy is based on freight-dependent sectors, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and warehousing. When combined, these industries make up 46.1 percent of the city's total employment, meaning that nearly half of Rockford's workers are employed by a freight-dependent industry. This highlights the importance of freight in the local economy and the need to continue to support and maintain growth in these industries. This importance largely stems from the city's geographic location in the Midwest, as well as its location at the convergence of three major interstate routes, three class I railroads, and the Chicago Rockford International Airport, all of which have seen growth in recent years.

Several recently announced business expansions in freight-dependent industries will create a significant number of new employment opportunities for residents, and that will have a direct impact on the local economy. In 2019, Pinnacle Logistics announced an expansion of their cargo-related operations expecting to create an additional 500 jobs at the airport. These jobs will support ground services and supply chain management for Amazon's Prime Air cargo fleet.<sup>iii</sup>

## Workforce Development, Talent Attraction, & Retention Efforts

A well-trained workforce, and the impact it can have on the lives of those workers, is significant to economic development. As part of its economic development plan, Rockford places a strong value on working closely with and supporting local organizations and leaders in the



community to ensure that citizens are provided training opportunities. These opportunities enable residents to thrive in the workforce and continue to meet the needs of the community's employers. Workforce development not only provides educational and career training programs that prepare those entering the workforce, but may also connect employers to a skilled workforce through employment services. Providing assistance and resources for job seekers is central to Rockford's economy and ensuring that businesses and employees thrive in it.

Another strategy tied to economic and workforce development is talent attraction and retention efforts that ensure a robust talent pool within the city. These efforts aim at incentivizing and cultivating an environment in which individuals find attractive to live and then decide to seek employment in that location. In the long run, investing in retention and attraction efforts can make cities more competitive and allow them to better leverage their current or future assets. Talent and attraction efforts provide a wide range of benefits that support local businesses and the community. For example, these efforts can create a unified employee-employer network, increase innovation and entrepreneurship, and incentivize community development and advancement. Attracting and retaining a workforce is the foundation for increased business growth, a factor playing a significant role in the overall economic development. Furthermore, workforce development-related incentives and programming can not only generate increased productivity and profitability in the workforce, but also curate an environment that embraces community well-being and place-making.

Highlighted below are just a few of the key partners and initiatives that are furthering the development of the city's labor force.

Advanced Technology Center: Rock Valley College's Advanced Technology Center (ATC) recently opened in Belvidere as a state-of-the-art advanced manufacturing learning facility. The 77,000 square foot facility will house programs aimed at meeting the educational needs of residents and the skill needs of area businesses. The ATC will offer a variety of courses, including CNC machining, industrial maintenance, mechatronics, truck driver training and welding, in an effort to serve as an economic engine and a workforce development hub the region.<sup>iv</sup>

Rockford University's Education Pathway Program: The RU Education Pathway program is an innovative plan designed to incentivize Rockford Public Schools (RPS) students to pursue a teaching career in Rockford. RU part-

ners with RPS to recruit students interested in pursuing a teaching degree beginning in middle school. Once in high school, students are able to join the education pathway and partake in a dual credit capstone course taught by both RU and RPS faculty. Following high school graduation, these students are able to enroll at RU and receive discounted tuition for their teaching degree. Enrolled students often pursue student-teaching at an RPS school and are better positioned for a full-time position with the Rockford public school system.

Alignment Rockford: Alignment Rockford is a nonprofit organization that works to support students within RPS and ensure their post-graduation success. This organization supports Rockford students with hands-on and virtual industry experience that not only assists students in determining their future careers, but also grows prospective talent for local employers.

The Workforce Connection: The Workforce Connection (TWC) is a partnership of employment and training programs, serving individuals and businesses in Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. TWC provides numerous programs and initiatives that support workforce development and talent retention. TWC offers a wide range of services that give career seekers the opportunity to find employment, education, and training opportunities within the region. TWC also works with employers to find skilled workers and access other services, including education and training opportunities for their current workforce. Career services include workshops and basic skills classes, career information, job search and resume assistance, and professional training.

Business Retention Visits by Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC): "At the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, we systematically get out from behind our desks to visit about 150 companies per year. We do this to gain a better understanding of our customers, in our case, Rockford Region businesses.

It's really about customer service and gaining a clear understanding of what is happening in the 'real' world. Excellent customer service is a must in all occupations, and serving existing industries is also our number one priority. Existing businesses drive more than 80 percent of all job creation and capital investment.

Our goal is to bring resources to the table to help the company continue to grow in the area. These resources might be a connection to financial assistance or working through a problem with the municipality.

Business Retention visits allow the RAEDC to understand a variety of industries that are important to our region and communities. These visits are a critical aspect of economic development." <sup>v</sup>

## Economic Development Programs & Incentives

### Enterprise Zones & River Edge Zone

The purpose of state legislation allowing the creation of enterprise zones is to assist in the revitalization of distressed areas by offering financial and tax incentives to stimulate business growth and neighborhood improvement. The City of Rockford has two enterprise zones. One is along I-90 and the other is spread out along U.S. Highway 20, Harrison Ave, Springfield Ave, West State Street, Auburn Street, and Preston Street. <sup>vi</sup>

### Tax-Increment Financing (TIF)

Illinois law allows units of local governments to designate areas within their jurisdiction as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts. These districts dedicate sales tax revenues and additional property tax revenues generated within the TIF for improvements within the district to encourage new economic development and job creation. Funds may be used for costs associated with the development or redevelopment of property within the TIF, allowing blighted, declining and underperforming areas to become viable again, and allowing these areas to compete with vacant land at the edge of urban areas.

#### Projects in TIF districts typically include:

- Redevelopment of substandard, obsolete, or vacant buildings;
- Financing public infrastructure improvements, including streets, sewer, and water in declining areas;
- Cleaning up polluted areas;
- Improving the viability of downtown business districts; rehabilitating historic properties, and
- Providing infrastructure needed to develop a site for new industrial or commercial use. <sup>vii</sup>

The city currently has 32 TIF Districts that are scattered throughout the city which include commercial, industrial, residential, and mixed-use properties. The city utilizes TIF Districts to finance public improvements and assist private development projects within targeted neighborhoods. This works to raise property values within a target

neighborhood to create new incremental tax revenues, which the city uses to improve the overall conditions within that neighborhood. TIF Districts can only be created by designated municipal government and can only last for a total of 23 years before they must be dissolved. TIF funds usually are a small portion of the overall project costs and are meant to close the gap between conventional bank financing, the owner's funds, and the project's costs. TIF funds often make previously infeasible development projects possible. <sup>viii</sup>

Currently, the City of Rockford is researching methods to develop a more robust, efficient, equitable, and overall a more effective TIF program. There are a number of TIF Districts that are set to expire over the coming years, which has prompted an internal review and update of our TIF District process.

### Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

The primary objective of the Community Development Block Grant Program is to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for persons of low and/or moderate income.

Eligible uses for CDGB funds include:

- Planning and capacity building,
- Acquisition and selling of real property,
- Public facilities improvements,
- Clearance, demolition and relocation of buildings,
- Public services including daycare, and fair housing,
- Emergency street repairs/advances,
- Loss of rental income due to relocation as a result of CDBG activities,
- Removal of architectural barriers which restrict disabled mobility,
- Assistance to privately owned utilities,
- Rehabilitation and preservation activities,
- Code enforcement,
- Economic development assistance by city or non-profit,
- Commercial Improvement by city or non-profit, and
- Special activities by sub-recipients.

### Brownfields Revitalization

A brownfield is a property that the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. A 2020 inventory identified 878 brownfield properties within the City of Rockford. The city recognizes that clean-up and redevelopment of these underutilized and potentially contaminated properties

is a key component in improving multiple variables that contribute to economic growth and blight reduction. The City of Rockford has been very successful in applying for and using Federal and State Brownfields Grant Funds dating back to 2000. At that time, the city was selected as one of the original United States Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfield Pilot Programs.

The city strongly recognizes that community participation and stakeholder involvement play an essential role in successful brownfields redevelopment. There are numerous success stories across the nation that can attest to this. It is the ideas and needs of our community that help prioritize the brownfields in our community, and seek out the necessary resources to transform blight into an asset that contributes to and improves our citizen's quality of life and our economic state.

## **Recent Major Development Projects**

### **Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD)**

Since 2015, the Northern Illinois Region has leveraged roughly \$7 million dollars in Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding for airport-related infrastructure and the promotion of aerospace jobs. This has led to more than \$50 million dollars of additional public and private investment being put into the regions aerospace, aviation, and logistics industries. These investments have resulted in the growth of the Chicago Rockford International Airport's (RFD) by nearly 2,000 additional jobs in 2019 alone, including temporary construction-related jobs and permanent or seasonal positions by new and existing airport tenants. EDA investments at RFD have assisted the airport in becoming a Midwest hub for e-commerce cargo freight. More than 2.3 billion pounds of cargo traveled through the airport in 2019, triple the volume of landed cargo weight recorded at the airport in 2015. Amazon's Prime Air, which has made Rockford a significant spoke in its rapidly expanding "hub and spoke" air freight network, is a large reason for this growth.

Additionally, United Parcel Service (UPS), which operates its second-largest U.S. air freight hub at RFD, has added jobs and retooled its Rockford facility to accommodate the increased volume of cargo it is routing through the airport. Construction of a 90,000-square-foot international cargo terminal at RFD began in October 2020. The airport is also developing an \$11 million terminal, which will be leased to a longtime airport tenant, Emery Air, along with other cargo companies. This is the first of two planned cargo buildings to accommodate airplane maintenance, which is expected to increase living wage jobs and bring

an estimated 600 new jobs to the airport, along with AAR adding an estimated 250 maintenance technician jobs.<sup>ix</sup>

### **US-20 & IL-2 (South Main Street)**

The interchange at US-20 and IL-2 (South Main Street) is strategically located to the northwest of the Chicago-Rockford International Airport and is approximately 4.5 miles south of Rockford's downtown core. A major reconstruction of the interchange was completed by the Illinois Department of Transportation in 2020. To the south of the interchange there are 485 gross acres of land able to be developed. This area consists of 15 parcels owned by three different property owners. The interchange site has already seen some new investment, including a Love's Truck Stop and other retail and restaurants to support the industrial growth at the airport. The western 320 acres of the interchange site is currently being marketed as Cornerstone at Global Trade Park, but site development has yet to begin. In 2020, Region 1 Planning Council commissioned a market analysis to examine the development prospects of this interchange as a part of multi-county interchange. At full build-out, development around this interchange could generate up to \$5.3 billion in economic activity and create up to 37,300 permanent jobs.<sup>x</sup>

### **I-90 & Riverside Boulevard**

In the city's far northeast corner, several major developments have and will continue to spur economic development opportunities for Rockford. In 2013, SwedishAmerican's Regional Cancer Center was the first medical facility to open at the interchange, located in the southwestern corner. The nearly \$40 million facility was built in collaboration with UW Health System, out of Madison, Wisconsin, and houses services such as medical oncology, chemotherapy and infusion, advanced radiation therapy, and medical imaging. In 2019, SwedishAmerican opened their \$24 million Creekside Medical Center, adjacent to the SwedishAmerican Regional Cancer Center. The four-story, 70,000 square-foot-clinic has 100 rooms and houses 30 medical providers. In 2019, MercyHealth also opened their new hospital, located in the interchange's southeastern corner. The Riverside campus is a six-story, 563,000-square-foot facility on 263 acres.

The construction of these three medical facilities has spurred significant development for the communities surrounding the interchange. A majority of the recent commercial and retail development has occurred north of Riverside Boulevard in the City of Loves Park, including a Costco Warehouse, several national chain restaurants, a gas station, and hotel.



# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE

### Reposition former industrial properties and abandoned sites for adaptive reuse or new construction

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue environmental assessment and remediation on sites constructed prior to 1950	\$\$\$	Long	Low
Develop ranking system for pre-1950 industrials sites to determine eligibility for repurposing or demolition for site readiness to increase chances of being developed or re-purposed	\$	Medium	Low
Develop qualified site program to assist property owners in advancing their land for site development readiness	\$	Short	Low
Continue to promote and encourage the use of New Market Tax Credits and other funding programs designed for repurposing industrial sites or parcels	\$	Medium	Low
Continue to foster partnerships with developers experienced in repurposing industrial sites for adaptive reuse	\$	Medium	Medium
Currently most re-development is market rate housing. There is an extreme waiting list with the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA), resulting in a great need for market rate housing options such as PUD's	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Increase funding for home owner assistance to offer home improvement loans for qualified low income residents	\$\$	Long	Medium
Conversion of multi-unit family dwellings into affordable condo units with a focus on low-income neighborhoods	\$\$	Long	Low
Encourage more residential ownership downtown to reduce number of rental units. Need smaller, more modern units for senior citizens or single/young families (affordability is key)	\$	Medium	High

### Ensure adequate supply of development ready land zoned for industrial and commercial uses

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue pursuing voluntary annexation of property in adjoining unincorporated areas	\$	Medium	High
Develop qualified site program to assist property owners in advancing their land for site development readiness	\$	Short	Low
Create tangible offerings to attract private developers	\$\$\$	Medium	Low
Develop and update a site selector interactive web-based mapping application to provide information to potential property buyers and investors, which also helps market our region better	\$\$	Short	High
Future developable sites need water, sewer, and electric in order to be shovel-ready. Need to align utilities with locations where development of future sites is desirable. Developers need these utilities and annexation before any financial commitments are made generally	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High

Identify, develop, and expand emerging economic clusters			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Target craft manufacturers to locate within designated Enterprise and River Edge Redevelopment Zones	\$	Long	Low
Continue to seek and host national and international sports and entertainment events	\$	Short	Medium
Develop and encourage businesses to utilize apprenticeship programs in recent growth industries and sectors	\$	Long	Medium
Identify, create and promote programs, activities, and policies fostering innovation in emerging and existing businesses, aiding in the development of more new/startup businesses and ultimately increasing economic development within the small business community	\$	Short	High
Foster new training programs and opportunities to support job growth demands in emerging industries	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue investments in roadway construction and access improvements, along transportation corridors to the airport where new development and economic growth is concentrated	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
Residents on 2nd and 3rd shift (night jobs) at UPS, Amazon, etc., have challenges getting to and from work due to lack of late night transportation options leaving the need for increased public transportation investment	\$	Long	Low
Encourage the growth and development of existing and new primary employment centers			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to encourage airport related development and supportive services to aid the growth of the Chicago-Rockford International Airport as a major air cargo transfer center (especially 1st and last mile)	\$\$\$	Medium	High
Continue encouraging development of hotels and retail services to support primary employment clusters and corridors especially along our major interstates and expressways, to capture through traffic overnight stays	\$\$	Short	High
Improve branding, wayfinding, and signage within industrial and commercial business parks for better marketing	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Determine more ways to get people to and from downtown from Embassy Suites, and to the venue they are in town for such as sporting events, weddings, tourism, and entertainment	\$\$	Short	High
Continue to pursue objective to revitalize Downtown Rockford on both the east and west side of the Rock River			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to encourage the development, amount, variety, and types of downtown living and housing options especially through adaptive reuse of unused buildings	\$\$	Short	High

Continue to expand the number, and variety, of destinations in downtown such as art, restaurants, shopping, leisure, sports, walking, exercise and entertainment venues	\$	Short	Medium
Utilize the special features downtown has to offer, such as the river, architecture, history	\$	Short	Medium
Provide safe, efficient, and attractive options for travel	\$\$	Short	High
Improve the state of neighborhoods in surrounding downtown areas	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Enhance the role of the Rock River and the riverfront especially through the redevelopment of abandoned/vacant buildings or structures	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Create more options for homeownership in downtown Rockford, condos, town homes, etc.- could be encouraged through reduced hookup fees, reduced building fees, taxes, etc.	\$	Long	Low
<b>Encourage the growth of existing and emerging commerce retail corridors</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to identify and prioritize land use through economic incentives to continue implementation of city council approved corridor plans, and future corridor planning studies	\$\$	Short	High
Support new pop-up retail locations	\$	Short	Low
Target destination retail uses	\$	Long	Low
Continue to conduct corridor studies and align funding opportunities for redevelopment of under served corridors, bringing them back to viable shopping options and destinations for retail and food locations	\$\$\$	Medium	High
<b>Attract more essential services to currently under served areas of the city</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Work to target public investment that encourages private development within neighborhood centers and commercial corridors	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to work with businesses to locate groceries, laundry/dry cleaning facilities and pharmacies within neighborhood centers and commercial corridors especially areas that are food deserts	\$	Short	High
Establish business incentive programs near neighborhood in transportation corridor areas	\$\$	Medium	Low
Continue to implement Business First programs in low-income/under served communities	\$	Short	High
Work to create a city with no food deserts or regions with low to no access to healthy and affordable food options	\$\$	Short	High



### Align local startup and expansion capital to encourage and accelerate entrepreneurial growth

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Encourage participation in self-employment training classes with Rock Valley College (RVC) and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC)	\$	Medium	Low
Promote the use of start-up business funding platforms	\$	Medium	Low
Develop and link entrepreneur networks with existing micro financing programs to fund and expand small business opportunities for new or emerging businesses	\$	Medium	Low
Continue, and possibly expand City's Business First Program	\$	Short	High
Improve awareness among all residents of existing small business and entrepreneur support programs to start or expand a small business	\$	Short	High
Align small businesses looking to expand with available resources to support growth and expansion, especially through grants/other funding	\$\$	Short	High

### Collaborate with local businesses to minimize the barriers to employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals currently residing in the city

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to partner with non-profit and private sector entities to expand prison reentry workforce training through local entrepreneurship programs	\$\$	Short	Medium

### Support regional efforts facilitating retention and attraction of young professionals

Create an annual city tour for residents, business owners, and prospective community members to showcase planned and currently underway projects	\$\$	Short	Low
Target positive promotions of Rockford to non-Rockford area markets through tourism and visitors bureau	\$\$	Short	High
Possible partnership with Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (RACVB) to promote region to younger couples and families as a great place to live and grow a family	\$\$	Short	Medium
Improve commuting options for younger professionals	\$	Medium	Medium
Offer more scholarships and internship opportunities for entry level jobs in our region to retain younger talent giving them an opportunity to stay	\$\$	Short	Medium
Public service announcement campaign geared toward young professionals. Focus on those who have never left Rockford, or decided to move back after living/working elsewhere using local testimonies as examples	\$\$	Short	Low
Create outreach programs for specific minority groups that are already moving to the region	\$	Medium	Low
Connect with Transform Rockford/Great Neighborhoods on attraction and retention effort alignment	\$	Short	Low

Promote the region's sustainability efforts, bike trails, parks, recreational opportunities, nightlife, and proximity to other major cities, with comparably lower cost of living. Promote affordability of home ownership	\$\$	Short	Medium
Promote Quality of Life- the region has one of the top park district in the nation- facilities, activities, and sports	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Use our location to other major cities but lower cost of living as a selling point	\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to protect the regions water quality and water resources for consumption, recreation opportunities, and intrinsic values	\$\$\$	Medium	High
<b>Preserve culturally, historically, and architecturally significant sites, buildings, and districts</b>			
Continue to promote the rehabilitation and reuse of locally designated resources within neighborhoods and commercial and industrial corridors	\$	Medium	High
Continue to ensure new development is compatible with historic districts	\$	Short	High
Continue to encourage new mixed-use developments especially on underutilized sites or through rehabilitation and adaptive reuse	\$	Short	Medium
Continue to encourage Historic Preservation and adaptive reuse of Commercial and Industrial buildings	\$	Short	Medium
Implement the newly adopted Historic Preservation Plan, 2022	\$	Short	Medium
When buildings are identified as historically, culturally, or architecturally significant, what are the next steps? Who should facilitate the redevelopment? Should a unit of government, or nonprofit be designated to protect some of these structures?	\$	Long	Low
<b>Align resources to support cultural and recreational institutions for increased economic development opportunities</b>			
Formalize a new culinary tourism program highlighting the local food and beverage market destinations throughout the city	\$\$	Medium	Low
Continue to support the expansion of neighborhood-based public art programming	\$\$	Short	High

## Chapter Endnotes

- i. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; “Labor force data by county”, 2000-2017 annual averages; <<https://www.bls.gov/lau/>>
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## EDUCATION - PUBLIC & PRIVATE

### Introduction & Background

Education is an essential component of any community and should be included in a comprehensive plan because it's a contributing factor to why people may choose to move to one particular area over others. Education shapes and prepares a city's young residents for the future by providing a foundation for social and fiscal success, as well as personal and professional development that can lead to post-secondary educational opportunities. The inclusion of an education section in a comprehensive plan contributes to the holistic picture of the region and creates space to address community gaps, as well as strengths and opportunities for continued success.

It can be difficult to address all aspects of education within a comprehensive plan because only so many metrics can be measured. Education metrics serve as an indicator and are helpful in gaining a holistic understanding of any community. It is important to note that these metrics are not always comparable on a broad scale due to different programs, testing formats and requirements across the nation. Additionally, not all types of intelligence and skills are able to be measured in academic settings. Further yet, other factors that cannot easily be shown through standard education metrics are the burdens and controversies associated with some education systems, such as equity, boundary line determinations, income concentrations, access to funding, and capacity building.

### History of Rockford Public Schools (K-12)

The City of Rockford is primarily served by the Rockford School District 205 (RPS205). The other areas are served by either Harlem School District 122 or Winnebago Community Unit School District 323. RPS205 is one of the largest school districts in Illinois, educating approximately 28,000 students annually from early childhood through high school. RPS205 has a long history, with both successes and challenges. In recent years new programs offer greater chances of success and improved opportunities to attend college locally with free tuition paid for by the Rockford Promise program.

Originally, public schools in the city were divided by the Rock River into two separate districts, one on the east side and one on the west side. These two districts were combined in 1884 to form the current Rockford school district.<sup>i</sup> As the City of Rockford grew in population, overcrowding began to occur during the late 1800s, leading to the expansion and construction of additional facilities to meet the growing demand. Rockford grew significantly in geographic size and population between the late 1930s and 1950s. To accommodate this growth, several neighborhood elementary and junior high schools were constructed as new neighborhoods were built. Additional high schools were also needed, resulting in the construction of three new high schools throughout the city, including Auburn High School (1960), Guilford High School (1963), and Jefferson High School (1969).

By the late 1980s, RPS205 was facing financial issues due to the size of the district in both terms of geographic coverage and the number of students served. In 1989, the Rockford School Board voted to pass a plan reducing district costs, titled “Together Toward a Brighter Tomorrow.” However, this plan was controversial as it would mean the closure of several schools and consolidating already under-served, displaced minority student populations. Community members formed a group called “People Who Care” and filed a federal class action lawsuit in 1989. RPS205 and the plaintiffs reached an agreement to reopen several elementary schools that were slated to close, invest in schools located in the southwest side of the city, and consider reopening one high school. This would be financed by a tax levy.<sup>ii</sup> However, RPS205 was not able to meet the first agreement requirements, resulting in another agreement through the courts. This second agreement was larger in scale, requiring the district to review its discipline and fairness procedures, open Marsh and Riverdahl Schools, replace Church School with a global studies academy, and implement specific academic programs for at-risk elementary students in predominately minority schools.

However, legal issues surrounding public education in the city continued, when a second lawsuit was filed by plaintiffs alleging decades of discrimination against minority students. The findings of this trial include the lack of integration among Rockford Public Schools, lack of minority teachers, lower quality facilities and equipment in high minority schools, educational tracking issues, and misinformed and isolating programming.<sup>iii</sup> This trial resulted in a Comprehensive Remedial Order from the presiding judge, however, main components of this order were struck down by the appellate court under the condition that the district close the achievement gap between white and minority students, as well as meet quotas for minority faculty members.

These lawsuits resulted in RPS205 implementing a ‘choice’ program, where students could pick the top three schools of their preference and then be placed by the racial composition of the school. However, the ‘choice’ program model was discontinued in 2010. RPS205 students are now placed according to neighborhood school boundaries.<sup>iv</sup> In 2020, neighborhood school boundaries were updated to account for recent overcrowding and capacity issues at a few of the elementary schools including Brookview, Riverdahl, and West View.<sup>v</sup> If the city does grow in the future additional school capacity should be discussed and planned for accordingly.

## Rockford Public Schools Today

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the school district here as it has across the rest of the nation. The pandemic has brought new challenges for educators, students, and parents. As a result, RPS205 has shifted how it operates and serves the community. In an effort to ensure the safety and health of their students, RPS205 followed recommendations from the Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Department of Public Health by offering hybrid, in-person, and online learning opportunities when required. The determination of hybrid, in-person, or online classroom formatting was based on the student’s age and infection rate age tiers, and instruction from the State of Illinois. For a significant time, all in-person instruction required that students and faculty wear masks and social distance in public.<sup>vi</sup> In February of 2022, RPS205 lifted its mask requirement for in person students at all schools.

Rockford Public School District 205 was the 3rd largest school district in the State of Illinois in 2022.<sup>vii</sup> Today, RPS205 has a total of 41 schools and a few gifted programs, currently educating approximately 28,000 students through early childhood and preschool programs all the way to high school and adult education programs. Several early childhood centers are available for pre-kindergarten students. There are also several charter schools and academies that provide students with a wide range of special programming for more innovative and higher quality educational opportunities.<sup>viii</sup>

RPS offers special programs for students at Maria Montessori at Marsh (self-guided learning), STEAM Academy at Haskell (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), Two-Way Language Immersion at Barbour, Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall School and Auburn High School, and Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) at Auburn High school (Dance, Instrumental Music, Theatre-Tech, and Media Arts, Vocal Music and Visual Arts).<sup>ix</sup>

Roosevelt Community Education Center serves high school students, pre-kindergarten and adult education, and has a daycare facility as well. Roosevelt focuses on developing relationships and creative learning opportunities to help students pursue their full post-secondary potential.<sup>x</sup> Roosevelt partners with Rock Valley College to offer 16 dual-credit courses and students participate in work-based learning within one of 12 career pathways.

Rockford Public Schools sets curriculum for public schools in the district and students are assigned public schools based on where they live. In contrast, charter schools are independent of the school district and create

an approved mission and curriculum specific to that school.<sup>xi</sup> This flexibility allows charter schools to be more innovative with programming but also puts more responsibility on charter schools to perform well. Charter schools are usually tuition free and publicly funded. Any student can attend, as there are no restrictions based on where they live, but there may be special requirements to attend and the interest can be high at times.

Rockford Public Schools			
	Grades		Grades
Beyer Early Childhood Center	PK	Spring Creek Elementary School	K-5
Fairview Early Childhood Center	PK	Washington Elementary School	K-5
Nashold Early Childhood Center	PK	Welsh Elementary School	K-5
Summerdale Early Childhood Center	PK	West View Elementary School	K-5
Maria Montessori Elementary School	PK-8	Whitehead Elementary School	K-5
Roosevelt Center	PK-12	Jackson Charter School	K-5
Bloom Elementary School	K-5	Barbour Two-Way Language Immersion	K-8
Brookview Elementary School	K-5	Galapagos Rockford Charter School	K-8
Carlson Elementary School	K-5	Legacy Academy Of Excellence	K-12
Cherry Valley Elementary School	K-5	Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall Elementary	1-4
Conklin Elementary School	K-5	Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall School	5-8
Constance Lane Elementary School	K-5	Eisenhower Middle School	6-8
Ellis Elementary School	K-5	Flinn Middle School	6-8
Froberg Elementary School	K-5	Kennedy Middle School	6-8
Gregory Elementary School	K-5	Lincoln Middle School	6-8
Hillman Elementary School	K-5	Rockford Environmental Science Academy	6-8
Johnson Elementary School	K-5	West Middle School	6-8
Lathrop Elementary School	K-5	Auburn High School	9-12
Lewis Lemon Elementary	K-5	East High School	9-12
Mcintosh Elementary	K-5	Guilford High School	9-12
Riverdahl Elementary School	K-5	Jefferson High School	9-12
Rolling Green	K-5		

Source: Illinois Report Card 2021 Data

## Map of School Districts

Five school districts are fully or partially located within the city of Rockford, including Rockford School District 205, Harlem School District 122, Pecatonica Unit School District 321, Meridian School District 223, and Winnebago Unit School District 323. Rockford School District covers the largest number of Rockford residents within the city limits, with the other four districts located along the outskirts.

The four public high schools are dispersed throughout the city, with Auburn High School located in the southwest, East High School located in the city center, Guilford High School in the northeast, and Jefferson High School to the south.

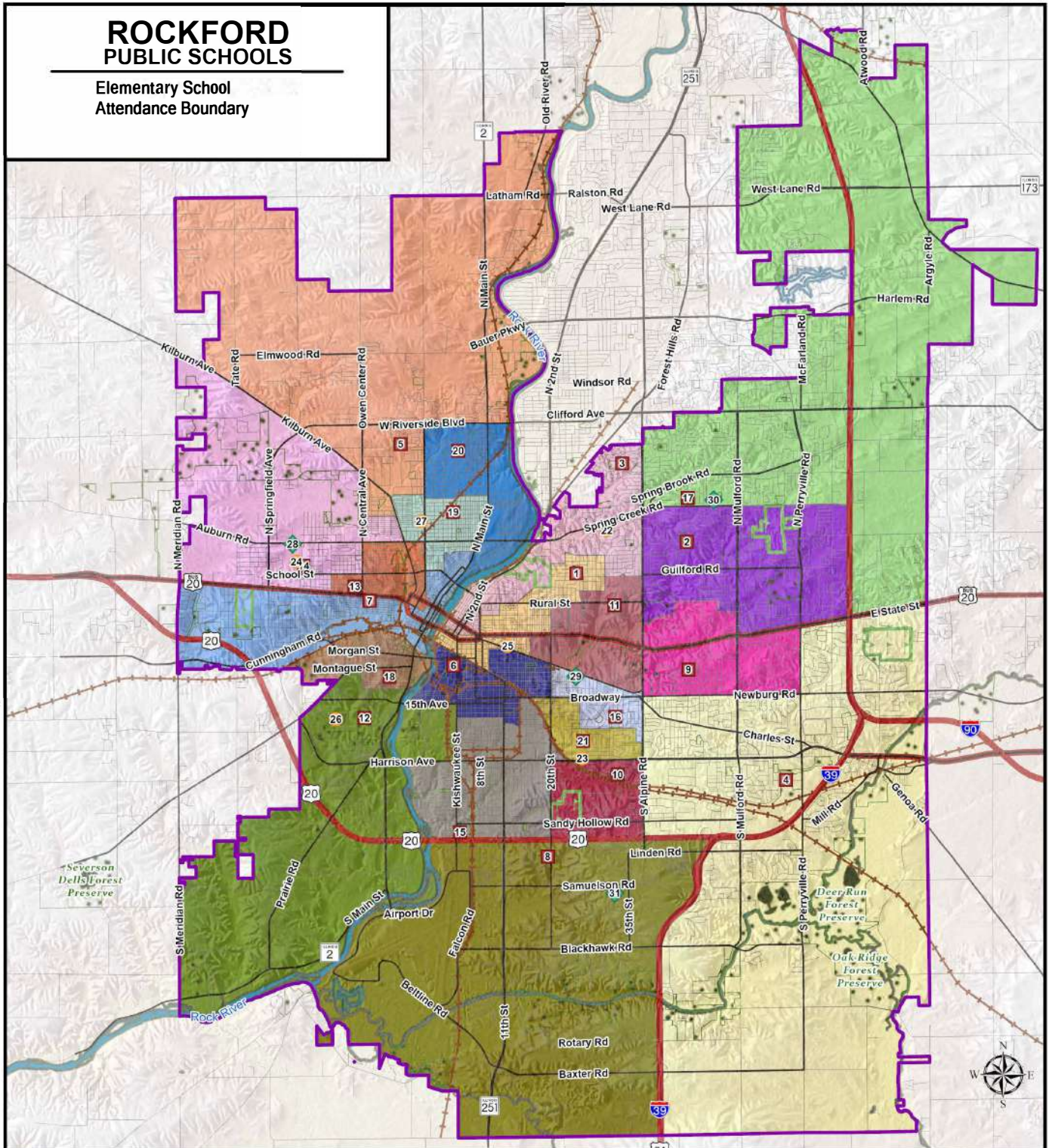
The private schools are mostly concentrated in the northern portion of the city, including Boylan Catholic High School and Rockford Lutheran High School; Keith County Day School is located just north of downtown, and Rockford Christian schools and Christian Life are located more towards the east and northeast.





# ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Elementary School  
Attendance Boundary



- District Boundary
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- Forest
- Park
- Golf

Elementary Schools			
1. Bloom Elementary	11. Johnson Elementary	21. Whitehead Elementary	29. East High
2. Brookview Elementary	12. Lathrop Elementary	<b>Middle Schools</b>	
3. Carlson Elementary	13. Lewis Lemon Elementary	22. Eisenhower Middle	30. Guilford High
4. Cherry Valley Elementary	14. McIntosh Elementary	23. Flinn Middle	31. Jefferson High
5. Conklin Elementary	15. Riverdale Elementary	24. Kennedy Middle	
6. Constance Lane Elementary	16. Rolling Green Elementary	25. Lincoln Middle	
7. Ellis Elementary	17. Spring Creek Elementary	26. RESA Middle	
8. Froberg Elementary	18. Washington Elementary	27. West Middle	
9. Gregory Elementary	19. Welsh Elementary	<b>High Schools</b>	
10. Hillman Elementary	20. West View Elementary	28. Auburn High	

Mapping data provided by Winnebago County, Rockford Public Schools, Illinois DNR, IDOT, US Census Bureau, and ESRI. Map created December 2020 by RSP & Associates, LLC.

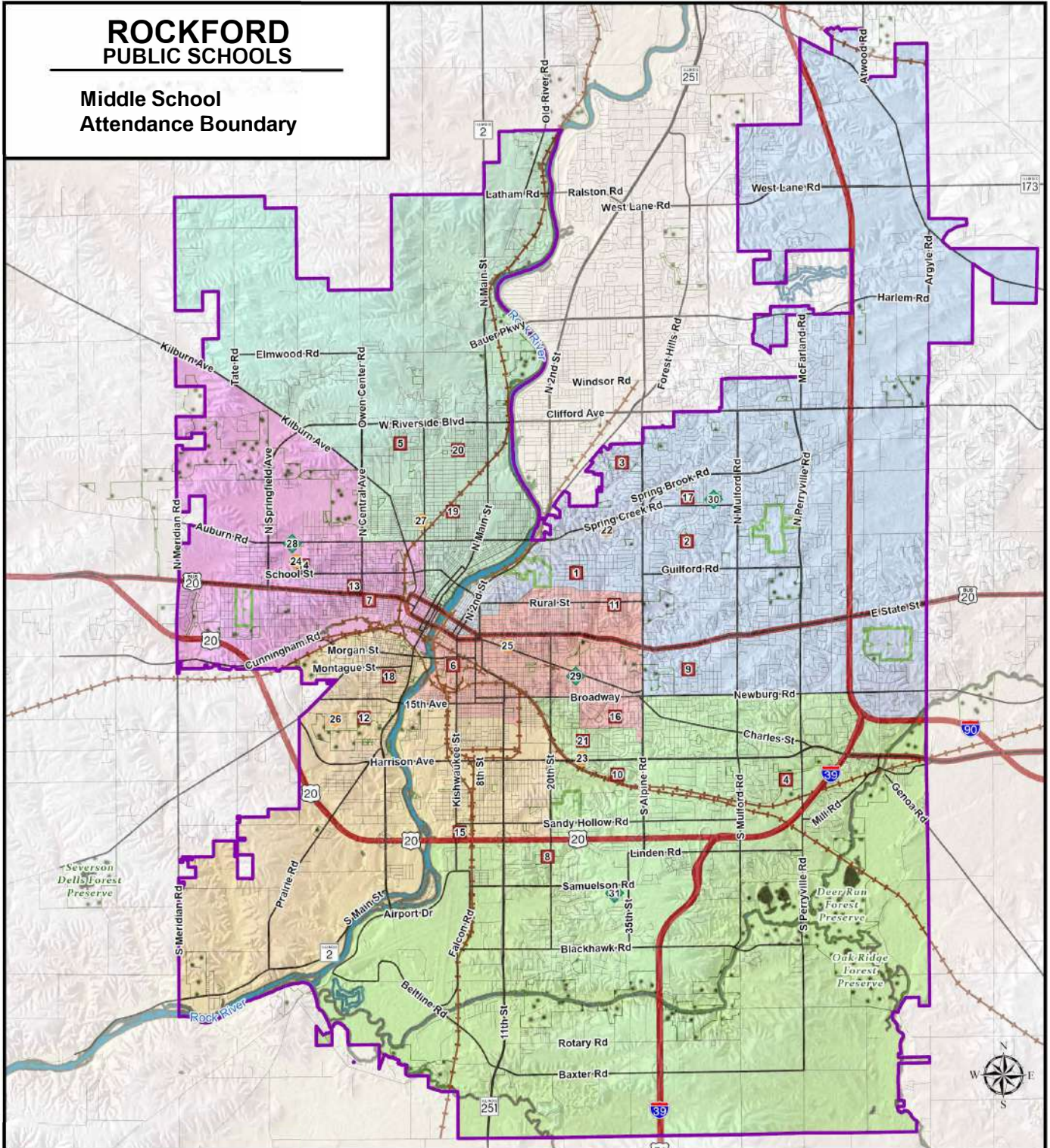
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# ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Middle School Attendance Boundary



- District Boundary
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- Forest
- Park
- Golf

Mapping data provided by Winnebago County, Rockford Public Schools, Illinois DNR, IDOT, US Census Bureau, and ESRI. Map created December 2020 by RSP & Associates, LLC.

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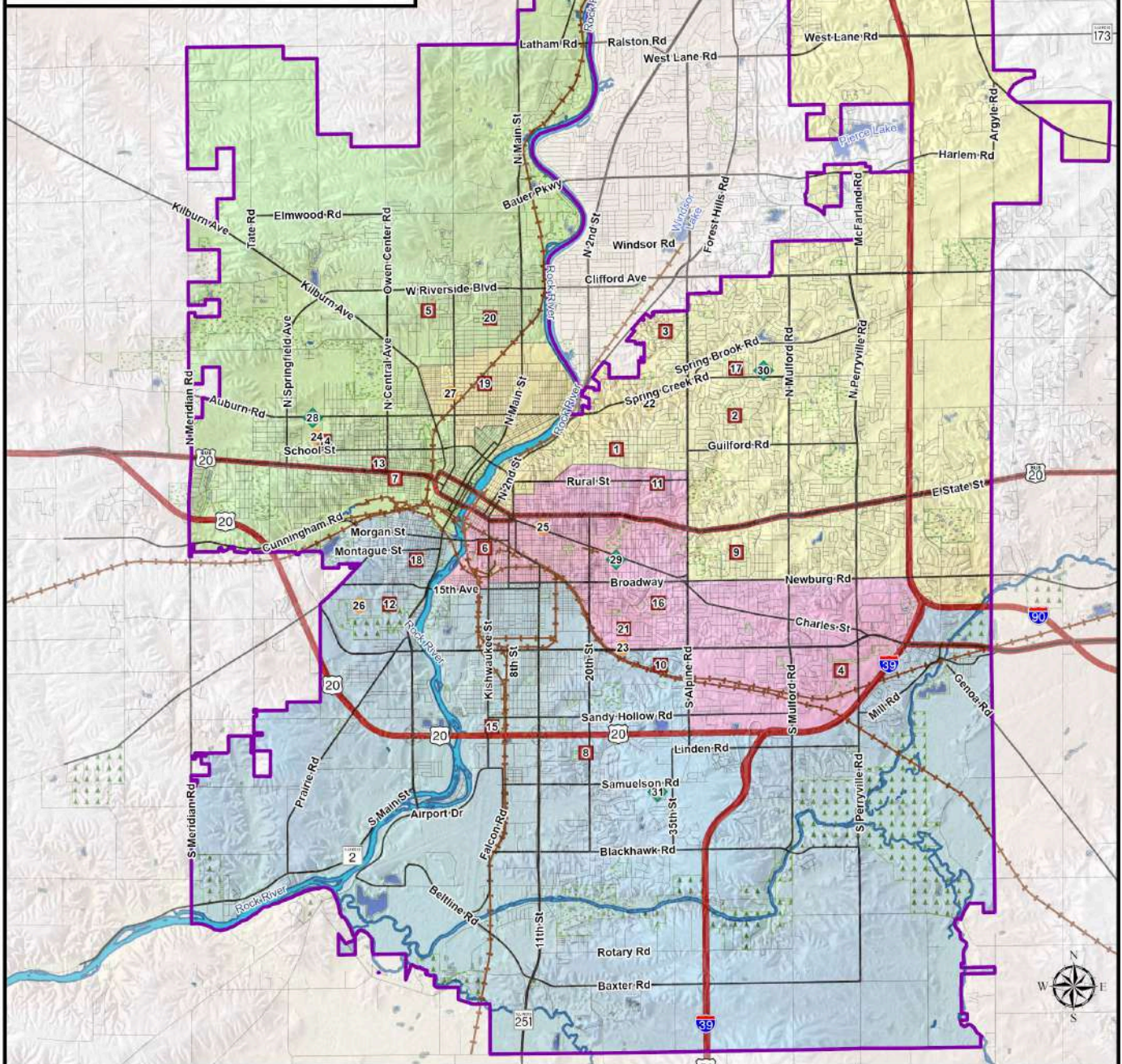


Elementary Schools			
1. Bloom Elementary	11. Johnson Elementary	21. Whitehead Elementary	29. East High
2. Brookview Elementary	12. Lathrop Elementary	<b>Middle Schools</b>	
3. Carlson Elementary	13. Lewis Lemon Elementary	22. Eisenhower Middle	30. Guilford High
4. Cherry Valley Elementary	14. McIntosh Elementary	23. Flinn Middle	31. Jefferson High
5. Conklin Elementary	15. Riverdahl Elementary	24. Kennedy Middle	
6. Constance Lane Elementary	16. Rolling Green Elementary	25. Lincoln Middle	
7. Ellis Elementary	17. Spring Creek Elementary	26. RESA Middle	
8. Froberg Elementary	18. Washington Elementary	27. West Middle	
9. Gregory Elementary	19. Welsh Elementary	<b>High Schools</b>	
10. Hillman Elementary	20. West View Elementary	28. Auburn High	



# ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## High School Attendance Areas



- District Boundary
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- Forest
- Park

Elementary Schools			
1. Bloom Elementary	11. Johnson Elementary	21. Whitehead Elementary	29. East High
2. Brookview Elementary	12. Lathrop Elementary	<b>Middle Schools</b>	
3. Carlson Elementary	13. Lewis Lemon Elementary	22. Eisenhower Middle	30. Guilford High
4. Cherry Valley Elementary	14. McIntosh Elementary	23. Flinn Middle	31. Jefferson High
5. Conklin Elementary	15. Riverdale Elementary	24. Kennedy Middle	
6. Constance Lane Elementary	16. Rolling Green Elementary	25. Lincoln Middle	
7. Ellis Elementary	17. Spring Creek Elementary	26. RESA Middle	
8. Froberg Elementary	18. Washington Elementary	27. West Middle	
9. Gregory Elementary	19. Welsh Elementary	<b>High Schools</b>	
10. Hillman Elementary	20. West View Elementary	28. Auburn High	

Mapping data provided by Winnebago County, Rockford Public Schools, Illinois DNR, IDOT, US Census Bureau, and ESRI. Map created January 2020 by RSP & Associates, LLC.

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## Private Schools (K-12)

In addition to public schools the city's residents are also served by 36 private schools accommodating students from pre-school to high school. While these private schools serve students throughout the entire city and the region, the schools are primarily concentrated in northern portions of the city.

Rockford Private Schools			
	Grades		Grades
Montesorri Private Academy	NS-9	Christan Life Schools	PK-12
East Riverside KinderCare	PK	Easterseals Academy	PK-12
Maray Drive KinderCare	PK	Keith Country Day School	PK-12
Northridge KinderCare	PK	North Love Christian School	PK-12
Rockford KinderCare	PK	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Academy	PK-12
Alpine Academy	PK-5	Regents Christian Academy	PK-12
St. Paul Cogie Academy	PK-5	Rockford Christian Schools	PK-12
Faith Academy	PK-6	Rockford Iqra School	PK-12
Allegro Academy	PK-7	CICS Jackson Charter School	K-5
Cathedral of St. Peter School	PK-8	Action Academy Rockford	K-8
Holy Family Catholic School	PK-8	Alpine Christian School	K-9
Spectrum Progressive School of Rockford	PK-8	Harvest Time Christian Academy	K-12
St. Edward School	PK-8	Kikifer's Entrepreneurial Academy	K-12
St. James Catholic School	PK-8	Beautiful Beginnings Community Outreach	6-12
St. Paul Academy	PK-8	Rockford Lutheran Junior/Senior High School	6-12
St. Paul Lutheran School	PK-8	Veritas Christi Hybrid Academy	6-12
St. Rita Catholic School	PK-8	Boylan Catholic High School	9-12
Berean Baptist Christian Schools	PK-12		
Cathedral Baptist School	PK-12		

Source: Private School Review Data.com

## Regional Overview

There are just over 80 schools serving prekindergarten through 12th grade located throughout the City of Rockford with over 40,000 students at least 3 years old enrolled through all levels in 2019. Looking at total enrollment numbers by grade cohorts within RPS 205 there are just over 8,200 students enrolled in 1st-4th grades, just under 8,300 students enrolled in 5th-8th grades, and about 7,800 students enrolled in 9th-12th grades. Within private schools, grade size increases consistently from

School Enrollment by Grade (2019)	Total		In Public School		In Private School	
	Total	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Nursery school, preschool	2,867	7.1%	2,349	6.9%	518	8.3%
Kindergarten	2,503	6.2%	1,990	5.9%	513	8.2%
Elementary: grade 1 to grade 4	9,163	22.8%	8,257	24.3%	906	14.5%
Elementary: grade 5 to grade 8	9,366	23.3%	8,282	24.4%	1,084	17.3%
High school: grade 9 to grade 12	8,926	22.2%	7,801	23.0%	1,125	18.0%
College, undergraduate	5,650	14.0%	4,214	12.4%	1,436	23.0%
Graduate, professional school	1,754	4.4%	1,088	3.2%	666	10.7%
Population 3 years and over enrolled in school	40,229		33,981		6,248	

Source: Private School Review Data.com & Illinois Report Card, 2021/2019

nursery school to grade 12, as seen in the school enrollment by grade table. Of course, the overall number of students in private schools is much less than in public schools, as not everyone has the means to attend.

As mentioned previously, the city is served by four public high schools: Auburn High School, East High School, Guilford High School and Jefferson High School, and several private schools, including Boylan Catholic High School, Rockford Lutheran High School, Rockford Christian, Christian Life, and Keith Country Day School. Auburn High School had the highest enrollment, followed by Rockford East, Guilford, and finally Jefferson. Looking specifically at RPS's secondary schools, data shows student enrollment declines as grade levels increase, with almost double the number of 9th graders as 12th graders. This is partially due to those graduating early, those that may transfer out of the district, or drop out altogether.

Enrollment, graduation rates, and test scores vary among the public high schools. Overall RPS205 has seen a steady enrollment between roughly 28,100 and 28,700 students over the last five years. According to the Illinois Report Card, RPS spent an average of \$7,400 per student on instruction in 2018, falling a little short of the state average of \$8,172 per student.

The overall graduation rate for RPS was 66 percent in 2019. This is significantly lower than the state and national graduation rates, which were both 86 percent in 2019. The RPS205 graduation rate dropped even further in 2021 to 64.4 percent.<sup>xii</sup> Many factors can affect student enrollment and graduation. One factor influencing the graduation and enrollment rates is student mobility, or the percentage of students who transfer in or out of school during the school year. In the 2018-2019 school year, 15 percent of students in RPS transferred schools, which was double the state's rate of 7 percent. The more recent drop may be associated to the pandemic.



Jefferson High School Graduation - 2021

## Student Diversity & Assessment

The Rockford Public School District serves a diverse range of students in terms of race, ethnicity, income, and language spoken at home. This diversity is especially seen in the racial and ethnic composition of the district with 71 percent of the students from a minority background. Looking at 2019 numbers, 32 percent of students enrolled in RPS205 were black or African American, 29 percent were White, 28 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent identified as two or more races, and 4 percent were Asian. The student population is expected to continue being racially and ethnically diverse as the city's total population also becomes more diverse, which follows national trends.

Rockford Public Schools also have a high percentage of students from families with a low income (64 percent) in 2019. Students, ages 3 to 17, meet the low-income criteria if they or their household receives public aid in the form of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or TANF (Targeted Assistance for Needy Families); are classified as homeless, migrant, runaway, in the Head Start program, or foster children; or live in a household where the household income meets (USDA) guidelines to receive free or reduced-price meals. It is important to address the needs of these students as there are identified gaps in academic achievement between those who are raised in poverty and those who are not. Students who are living in poverty may have a more stressful home life or assist in supporting their families financially. It is important that school and community leaders are aware how poverty impacts student behavior and learning capacity in the classroom and can stifle academic achievements.<sup>xiii</sup>

Seventeen percent of all students enrolled in RPS205 are English learners, meaning their primary language is not English. These students may receive English language instruction as a part of their education to target individual learning needs. Looking specifically at the secondary schools, Auburn High School has the lowest percentage (2 percent) of students whose primary language is not English, while Rockford East has the highest percentage (17 percent) of students who are English learners. Of the students that are considered low income the percent of English learners jumps to 64%. This puts already disadvantaged students at an even higher risk of being unsuccessful.

High School Enrollment by Ethnicity (2019)	White	Black	Hispanic	American Indian	Asian	Two or More Races	Pacific Islander
Auburn High School	29%	41%	20%	0%	4%	6%	0%
Guilford High School	38%	24%	27%	0%	4%	7%	0%
Jefferson High School	24%	21%	46%	0%	3%	5%	0%
Rockford East High School	30%	28%	28%	0%	8%	7%	0%
All Grades RPS205	29%	32%	28%	0%	4%	7%	0%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

Student Demographics by High School (2019)	Low Income	English Learners
Auburn High School	62%	2%
Guilford High School	51%	10%
Jefferson High School	69%	14%
Rockford East High School	66%	17%
Rockford School District 205	64%	17%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data





The Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) is a federally-required measure of the number of students meeting the Illinois Learning Standards in English language, arts and mathematics. IAR results are typically used to measure student growth as well as school and district accountability, and is administered to students between 3rd and 8th grades. In 2019, the median of the percentage of RPS students that did not meet IAR expectations was 34 percent, while 27 percent partially met expectations, 13 percent met expectations, and only 1 percent exceeded expectations when looking at the median of the average test scores.<sup>xiv</sup> Of the schools within RPS, Thurgood Marshall Private School had the highest percentage of students meeting IAR expectations at 55 percent and 40 percent exceeding expectations. In contrast, several schools within the district had at least 50 percent or more students not meeting IAR expectations in 2019. This disparity should be addressed.

Illinois Assessment of Readiness by School (2019)					
	Did Not Meet	Partially Met	Approached	Met	Exceeded
Lincoln Middle School	40%	26%	22%	12%	1%
Flinn Middle School	34%	26%	29%	10%	1%
Eisenhower Middle School	25%	23%	26%	22%	4%
Kennedy Middle School	48%	27%	15%	5%	0%
West Middle School	35%	29%	25%	10%	1%
Froberg Elementary School	19%	22%	24%	32%	2%
Barbour Two-Way Language Immersion	35%	31%	27%	8%	0%
Brookview Elementary School	24%	22%	26%	26%	2%
Bloom Elementary School	33%	27%	27%	13%	0%
Cherry Valley Elementary School	23%	27%	28%	22%	1%
Carlson Elementary School	24%	34%	25%	17%	1%
Conklin Elementary School	44%	22%	22%	10%	1%
Constance Lane Elementary School	51%	29%	13%	6%	1%
Ellis Elementary School	52%	28%	16%	3%	0%
Gregory Elementary School	28%	29%	23%	19%	1%
Haskell Elementary School	45%	26%	22%	7%	1%
Lathrop Elementary School	34%	31%	25%	10%	0%
Lewis Lemon Elementary	62%	22%	10%	6%	0%
Johnson Elementary School	29%	25%	26%	20%	1%
Mcintosh Elementary	48%	32%	18%	2%	0%
Maria Montessori Elementary School	24%	21%	34%	20%	1%
Welsh Elementary School	54%	26%	13%	7%	0%
Riverdahl Elementary School	41%	31%	19%	9%	1%
Rockford Environmental Science Academy	39%	28%	20%	13%	1%
Rolling Green	33%	24%	26%	18%	0%
Spring Creek Elementary School	18%	20%	31%	27%	4%
Hillman Elementary School	37%	30%	23%	11%	0%
Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall Elementary	1%	3%	16%	50%	29%
Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall School	0%	0%	4%	55%	40%
Washington Elementary School	47%	30%	13%	10%	0%
West View Elementary School	32%	31%	20%	16%	1%
Whitehead Elementary School	30%	31%	24%	14%	0%
Galapagos Rockford Charter School	32%	24%	24%	19%	2%
Jackson Charter School	48%	31%	15%	6%	0%
Legacy Academy Of Excellence	32%	28%	25%	15%	0%
Median Value of All	34%	27%	23%	13%	1%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

Another testing standard used to gauge academic achievement is the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). This test is often used for admissions by universities as a way to determine a student's level of college readiness in Math, English, and Language Arts.<sup>xv</sup> Rockford Public Schools had 17 percent of students meet the SAT standards and only 5 percent exceeding standards when looking at the mean of the schools average as a whole. Auburn High School and Guilford High School had the highest average SAT scores.

Measuring if a student is "on track" by the end of ninth grade is another measure of academic achievement used in Illinois. Students identified as "on track" have earned at least five full-year course credits (10 semester credits) and have earned no more than one "F" in a core course (English, math, science, or social science). Students who finish the ninth-grade year on track are almost four times more likely to graduate from high school than students who are not. In 2019, RPS205 had 63 percent of students in ninth grade on track, with the remaining at risk of not graduating. This number improved to 68% in 2021.<sup>xvi</sup>

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) by School (2019)				
	Partially Meets	Approaching	Meets	Exceeds
Auburn High School	37%	30%	21%	12%
Guilford High School	42%	34%	19%	5%
Jefferson High School	51%	32%	14%	2%
Rockford East High School	46%	38%	14%	2%
Rockford School District 205	44%	33%	17%	4%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

9th Grade on Track by School (2019)	
School	Students
Auburn High School	58%
Guilford High School	74%
Jefferson High School	66%
Rockford East High School	57%
Rockford School District 205	63%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

RPS205 has approximately 24 percent of its students enrolled in early college courses as of 2019. In total, there were 5,156 advanced placement exams taken by RPS205 students with only 2,456 resulting in college credits. Auburn High School had the most advanced placement exams resulting in college credits, making up 76 percent of the district's total.

As previously mentioned, the overall graduation rate for RPS was 66 percent in 2019. Guilford High School had the highest graduation rate of 71 percent, while Auburn High School had the lowest graduation rate of 63 percent. A high school diploma is vital both for students who plan to enter college and students who plan to enter the workforce.<sup>xvii</sup> Graduation rates varied among race and ethnicity. Asian students have the highest graduation rates across all public high schools while black

Students Taking Early College Courses by School (2019)										
	Total Students		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Auburn High School	630	35%	123	18%	118	26%	199	57%	190	58%
Guilford High School	469	26%	58	10%	97	20%	190	43%	124	4%
Jefferson High School	342	20%	68	10%	38	9%	129	41%	107	41%
Rockford East High School	384	21%	87	15%	62	13%	118	31%	117	32%
Rockford School District 205	1,818	24%	336	12%	312	16%	633	37%	538	38%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

or African American students have lower graduation rates among all ethnicities.

In 2019, Rockford Public Schools had 51 percent of students enrolled in college within twelve months of graduating high school. That number increased very slightly at sixteen months to 52 percent. Auburn High School, Rockford East High School, and Guilford High School had over half their graduating students enrolled in college.

Graduation Rates by School (2019)	
	Graduation Rate
Auburn High School	63%
Guilford High School	71%
Jefferson High School	66%
Rockford East High School	66%
Rockford School District 205	66%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

In Rockford, more post-secondary students are enrolled in community colleges than at universities. Rock Valley College, the community college serving the City of Rockford, has accessible locations throughout the region, and is more affordable than most traditional or larger colleges in the region. In 2019, it was estimated that within 12 months following graduation, RPS had 33 percent of graduates enrolling in a community college and 18 percent enrolling in universities. Of the four public high schools, Auburn High School has the most graduates enrolling in post-secondary educational programs with 55 percent, of which 29 percent are enrolled in a community college and 26 percent are enrolled in a university. Rockford East and Guilford High Schools followed Auburn High School's post-secondary enrollment rates at 52 percent and 50 percent, respectively. Jefferson High School had the lowest post-secondary enrollment rate at 46 percent.

Post-Secondary Educational Institutions

Access to post-secondary educational opportunities is key to a city's workforce. Whether it's an associate degree, bachelor's degree, trades or apprenticeship certification, a post-secondary education provides residents the necessary skills and training needed to pursue higher paying careers. Not only are there individual benefits for students who attend post-secondary school, but there are also benefits to the public and community in general. Post-secondary education can improve quality of life, lead to better health outcomes, increase civic engagement and results in higher tax revenues, which in turn are reinvested back into the community.<sup>xviii</sup>

Looking at educational attainment, 84 percent of Rockford's population has at least graduated high school or an equivalent education such as a GED. Of this 84 percent, 31 percent of the population has obtained only a high school diploma, 23 percent have attended some college but do not have a degree, 8 percent have an associate degree, 22 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, 14 percent have received a bachelor's degree, and 9 percent have earned a graduate degree or

Students Enrolling in College by Type (2019)						
	Within 12 Months			Within 16 Months		
	Community College	Universities	Trade/Vocational	Community College	Universities	Trade/Vocational
Auburn High School	29%	26%	0%	29%	27%	0%
Guilford High School	33%	17%	0%	35%	17%	0%
Jefferson High School	30%	16%	0%	31%	16%	0%
Rockford East High School	40%	12%	0%	42%	12%	0%
Rockford School District 205	33%	18%	0%	34%	18%	0%

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

higher. Many Rockford residents have chosen to get their degree from several opportunities for post-secondary education within the city offering associate degrees, bachelor degrees, and a career college.

The City of Rockford is served by seven post-secondary educational institutions within the city limits and nineteen institutions within approximately 65 miles of downtown Rockford. A brief summary of the post-secondary institutions within the city is provided below.

Rock Valley College

Rock Valley College (RVC) is a public community college offering over 30 accredited two-year degree programs with discounted tuition fees for residents of Winnebago and Boone Counties. In the 2017-2018 academic year, approximately 6,000 students per semester were enrolled in RVC. The average RVC student age was 24 but the college

serves a wide range of residents. The per credit hour tuition rate is \$115 or approximately \$3,765 per year. Sixty percent of students enrolled at RVC receive some sort of financial aid.<sup>xix</sup> RVC attracts and locally retains workforce talent through their affordable, post-secondary educational opportunities.<sup>xx</sup>

Rock Valley College's department of Engineering and Technology offers many degree and certificate programs including Electronic Engineering Technology, Manufacturing Engineering Technology, Mechatronics, and Sustainable Energy Systems. Additionally, RVC and Northern Illinois University (NIU) have partnered to allow students to earn a NIU degree in Mechanical Engineering at RVC.

The RVC Advanced Technology Center (ATC) is the institution's new state-of-the-art, 77,000 square-foot fa-



cility located in Belvidere. The ATC will house many of RVC's manufacturing, technology, and industrial-based programs that provide hands-on learning preparing students and currently-employed workers for high-demand jobs with local manufacturers. The programs offered in its opening semester included: CNC Machining, Industrial Maintenance, Mechatronics, Truck Driver Training, and Welding.

RVC is also known regionally for its Nursing program, where students can earn an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) Degree and be eligible to sit for the NCLEX-RN exam to earn Registered Nurse (RN) credentials. Graduates of the program are often employed at one of the three local hospital systems, as well as other private healthcare entities. Once hired, these RNs are then expected to complete a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN). To help facilitate an easy transition into a RN-BSN Completion Program, RVC Nursing has developed partnerships with five RN-BSN completion programs.

#### Rockford University

Rockford University is a private four-year institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. This university attracts a variety of talent to the area, including international students as well as transfer students. In fall of 2020, Rockford University had a total of 924 full-time undergraduate students and saw an increase in the number of students enrolled in their Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and Master of Education (M.Ed) programs compared to 2019. Undergraduate tuition is \$465 per credit hour, while graduate-level tuition is \$750 per credit hour for Masters of Business Administration, and \$650 per credit hour for MAT and M.Ed.

#### Rasmussen University Rockford

Rasmussen University is a private institution with four locations in Illinois, including one in Rockford. The various Illinois locations help strengthen connections and opportunities between Rockford and the Chicagoland area. This institution offers a variety of degrees ranging from associate degrees to master's degrees across seven schools of study (Justice, Nursing, Education, Business, Design, Health Sciences, and Technology). Rasmussen strengthens the local workforce by offering flexible and affordable degree programs as low as \$10,000.<sup>xxi</sup>

#### Rockford Career College

This accredited institution offers both diploma and associate degree programs in areas such as animal sciences, business, medical, legal, and skilled trades. In addition to these programs, the college also works with employers to

connect students to employment and internship opportunities. This is another educational institution that helps prepare community members in the region for the workforce at an affordable price point, while also attracting other talent in surrounding areas.<sup>xxii</sup>

#### University of Illinois – School of Medicine

The University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford is a 20-acre campus located in Rockford, IL. The university provides community-based medical training to medical students, residents, and fellows. The College of Medicine is internationally recognized as a leader in rural medical education. The university's programs include Doctor of Medicine, Rural Medical Education (RMED), and Master of Science Degree in Medical Biotechnology (MBT), Family Medicine Residency, and several others. In recent years, the university has expanded its campus across the street and built additional educational facilities. In August of 2021, UIC Medicine Rockford announced plans to expand its facilities yet again with a \$100 million construction project. The new educational facility will focus on areas such as dentistry, public health, social work, and applied health. The proposed expansion could reportedly double the number of enrollees in these programs.<sup>xxiii</sup>

#### Saint Anthony College of Nursing

Owned and operated by OSF HealthCare, Saint Anthony College of Nursing is a private college accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Saint Anthony College of Nursing offers a Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) and Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree programs with a fall 2020 enrollment of 210 undergraduates. The estimated tuition and fees per year is \$27,611.

#### Northern Illinois University

Northern Illinois University (NIU) is a public university based in DeKalb, IL, but has several charter campuses located in Chicago, Naperville, and Rockford. Total enrollment for all of the NIU system was 16,234 in fall of 2021 with 11,834 undergraduate and 4,079 graduate students. Programs offered at the NIU Rockford campus for undergraduate degrees include the College of Visual and Performing Arts as well as several graduate-level courses, including a Master of Arts in Teaching – Elementary Education, Master of Public Administration, Master of Science in Education – Education Administration, Master of Science in Education – Literacy Education (ESL/Bilingual Education), Master of Science in Education – Literacy Education (Reading), Educational Specialist (Ed.S) – Educational Administration, and Doctor of Education – Educational Administration.

## Education & Local Workforce Connection

Higher education and workforce development programs work in tandem to strengthen the local economy and support a higher quality of life for residents. These programs both address the needs of the employers and community members by empowering and preparing residents to enter or re-enter the local workforce. Post-secondary educational opportunities can help attract new employers and talent, as well as bring communities together through education, social, and cultural events. Numerous partnerships exist within the city that help facilitate the connection between education and workforce.

One of the most notable organizations in Rockford working to make these connections is The Workforce Connection. This organization is led by a board of local business leaders; it was established by the Governor of Illinois as a result of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Workforce Connection serves as a regional workforce development resource for Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. They also focus on addressing gaps in access to needed employment resources in the Northern Illinois Region through skill building programs and employment connections. As a result, more community members are able to develop their skills and confidently seek employment opportunities, ultimately creating a stronger local workforce.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The Workforce Connection Center, located at 303 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61101, helps community members explore post-secondary educational and career opportunities by providing computer access, resume and job application assistance, career guidance, assistance for veterans and people with disabilities, refugee and immigrant services, workshops, and basic skills classes.<sup>xxv</sup> This center also helps employers with talent acquisition, providing assessments, specific training needs, and workplace programming.<sup>xxvi</sup> There are also a number of private staffing agencies in Rockford that connect job seekers to employers.

Workforce development programs are comprehensive in nature and can address the wide range of needs of both job seekers and employers, strengthen the local economy, spur business competitiveness, and create a bridge between education and the workforce.<sup>xxvii</sup> Post-secondary institutions also offer many benefits, including community engagement (with broad community learning opportunities), attracting new industries, employers and employees, and fostering a strong economy.



East High School Graduation - 2021

# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## EDUCATION

### Work to increase educational attainment rate

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Align and support programs designed to improve the quality and availability of early childhood learning and family support services	\$\$	Short	High
Promote Rock Valley College aviation and maintenance technology certification program	\$	Short	Medium
Market support services to increase GED class enrollment and completion	\$	Long	Medium
Provide support for implementing Rockford Promise and work to expand the program with increased funding	\$\$\$	Short	High
Introduce more vocational and technology classes with more exposure opportunities in middle and high school to better align with opportunities after graduation	\$\$	Short	High

### Align and support regional efforts for retaining Rockford residents, and attracting new students to enroll in certificate courses, associates degrees, college, and graduate student programs in order to find local jobs when they graduate from higher learning institutions

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Develop and implement ACT Work Keys, manufacturing skills standards, and certification credentials for students	\$	Medium	Medium
Identify local businesses that are in need of skilled workers and align them with local educational institutions to train and employ locally	\$	Short	High
Before graduating 12th grade, educate students on readiness for work skills, soft skills, and life skills needed to succeed in any work environment	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue, and increase, informing high school students of local trades programs and apprenticeship opportunities that align with local skilled positions that are ready to hire	\$	Short	Medium
Continue to support Rockford Comprehensive Community Solutions (CCS) programming including YouthBuild, RockForWork, and ALPHA	\$\$\$	Short	High

### Expand post-high school learning programming and facilities

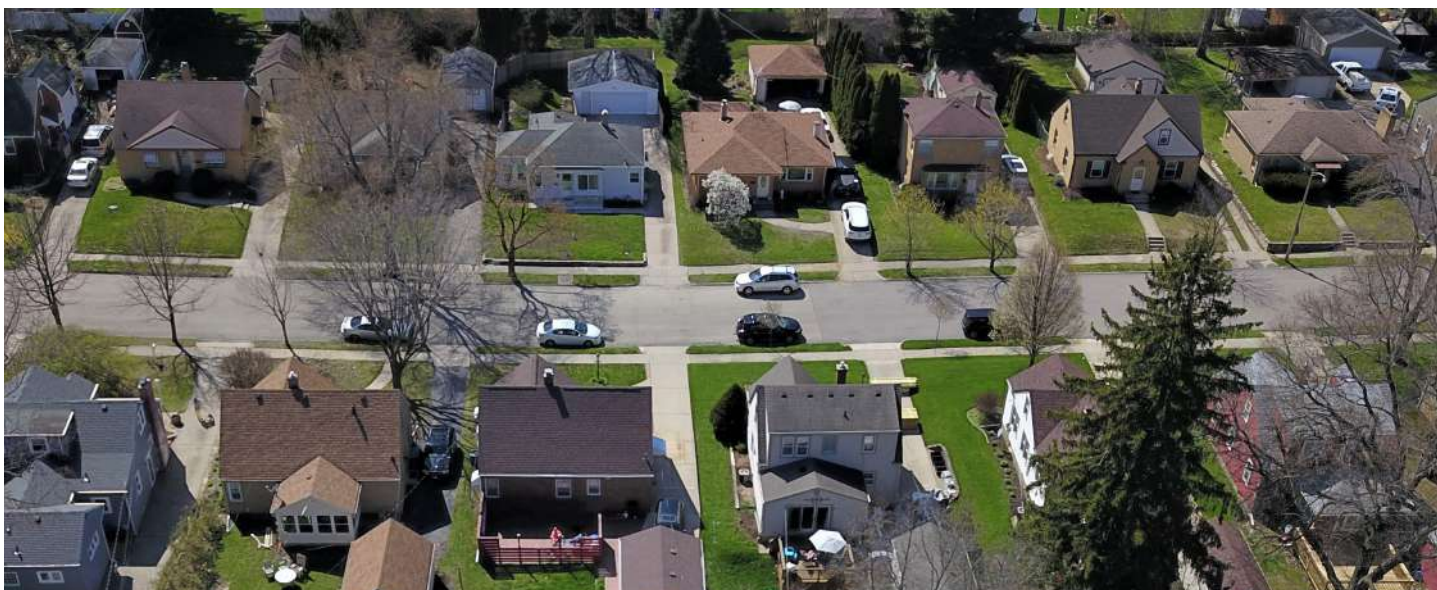
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify opportunities to physically connect college and university campuses to the community	\$	Long	Medium
Research and identify ways to create more support and options to inform local high school students, and those interested in obtaining their GED, of the opportunities to attend college or trade school in Rockford	\$	Medium	Medium
Increase funding to support individuals who wish to get their GED, and then align opportunities to attend a local college or trades program	\$\$	Medium	High



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## HOUSING & LIVABILITY

### Introduction & Background

All individuals have basic needs, with the most commonly agreed upon needs being access to food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep, and clean air to breathe. These basic needs are important in defining the minimum quality of life, and it's up to the city to coordinate services and the allocation of resources accordingly to meet these needs. Adding information on basic needs to a comprehensive plan provides a better understanding of the range of needs community members have and ensures adequate strategies and resources are identified, such as supportive housing and other assistance programs.

The following chapter highlights one of these basic needs, shelter, and how the City of Rockford is addressing programming and the allocation of resources and services to meet this basic need. First, it is important to understand the three key components that need to be addressed to ensure housing: equitable access, choice, and removal of barriers.

#### Equitable Access to Housing

Housing equity is important, especially when maintaining or addressing fair housing choice issues within a community. The principle of housing equity provides legislative and overall policy justification for programs that address housing-related disparities and is applicable in every part of the housing obtainment process. Confronting housing inequities can empower community members, provide avenues for action against discriminatory practices, and foster a diverse population, which affects the local economy and workforce. However, one of the burdens to ad-

ressing housing equity is that inequities can be hard to prove, as many are only recognized retrospectively and current programming may not address past disparities. Also, those who generally face housing inequalities often times do not have the means, or knowledge necessary, to fight them.

Like many cities in the United States, the effects of Rockford's past discriminatory housing policy and planning can still be seen today. However, housing policy and programming stakeholders, both local and federal, are working to address these inequities through housing policy and programming.<sup>i</sup> Two recent programs and policies demonstrate how housing inequalities are being addressed in Rockford. First, in 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reached a settlement with an Illinois bank that was participating in illegal redlining practices of Rockford minority neighborhoods. Another example occurred in 2020 when Prairie Street Legal Services received \$360,000 from HUD to offer a range of fair housing enforcement services, including helping those who may have been discriminated against.<sup>ii</sup>

#### Housing Choice

One of the goals of the Federal Housing Act of 1949 was to have "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." That was the city's goal in 1980, and remains its goal today. The city's mission over the next 20 years will be to hold onto increased housing affordability while removing barriers and burdens. If the latter is to be accomplished, it will most likely be through activities



generated at the neighborhood level, not by city housing programs. However, sustaining affordability can most definitely be influenced by a continuation and evolution of housing programs and policies.

Fair housing, or fair housing choice, is vital for a community to have equitable standards and a high quality of life. The Fair Housing Act ensures that individuals have legal recourse against lenders, landlords, and insurers that use exclusionary or discriminatory policies and tactics. These standards and legislation pave the way for people with housing barriers to have housing options. Fair housing standards are the framework for combating poverty, spurring community development, encouraging diversity, and providing accessibility and affordability. It is important to have a range of affordable housing stock to support a diverse community and local economy, while providing stable healthy housing for all community members.

There are many benefits to Fair Housing Choice standards and programming, including enforcement against discrimination, increased access to those with housing barriers, empowerment of those experiencing discrimination, and increased diversity in terms of community income and talent. This in turn helps to lead to a balanced, robust housing market. While there are many benefits as a result of fair housing choice programs, there are also issues that may arise. For example, it can be hard to enforce, as some forms of discrimination may be difficult to prove. Additionally, fair housing programs often have capacity and funding issues. For example, there are often waiting lists for housing support programs due to staffing and funding limits not aligning with overall needs.

### **Barriers to Housing**

Barriers to housing vary based on the geographic location and even the individual situations of people. Some barriers can be addressed directly through legal or governmental channels, such as through HUD, while other barriers may be addressed through non-profit and local government programming. Some general barriers to housing for individuals and families include addiction and substance abuse, mental or physical illness, low income, lack of a support network, access to resources, vacancy rates, prior convictions, prior evictions, past foreclosures, poor credit, lack of security deposit and/or application fees, and discrimination (of any protected class). Some of the housing barriers experienced the most by Rockford residents include fair housing education and outreach, need for decent, safe, and affordable rental housing, lack of affordable homeownership opportunities, and economic or income issues.

It is vital to acknowledge these barriers in order to address local housing issues. Understanding and acknowledging these barriers informs public policy and community goals, especially when addressing homelessness. Lack of acknowledgment may lead to misinformation or under informed programming, resulting in less effective programming to address this complex issue. Removing barriers to housing is important for communities to alleviate homelessness, improve community health outcomes, and in helping community members meet basic needs. This may also lead to lower taxpayer burdens and reduced emergency service utilization. However, programming and policies can only address so much and it is important to keep in mind that housing barriers change over time, as society and wages adjust to current events or the market.

### **Historic Preservation**

The city recently updated its Historic Preservation Plan with the help of staff and the Historic Preservation Committee (HPC). It was adopted by the Preservation Commission on July 13th, 2021, and by the Rockford City Council on December 20th, 2021.

Every viable community has an identity, a clear image of itself through which it defines itself to its own citizens and to the rest of the world. A key factor that makes a community different from another community is its historical development, and the most visible evidence of that development is a community's buildings and historical sites that still exist, or have been restored or re-purposed.

By preserving historic sites and structures, we retain our grasp on one of the things that makes Rockford what it is - our past. Gertrude Stein once said "There is no there, there," in describing Oakland, California. If we do not preserve our historical neighborhoods and sites, then there will be no "there" in Rockford, either. We will become just one more "modern" American city, indistinguishable from any number of others that have succeeded in burying their past under bulldozers and new buildings.

In an era of rapid change, with new technologies altering our lives on a daily basis, physical evidence of our past can help us to recognize and hold on to our cultural and physical roots. In that way, we can maintain a clear perspective of who we are by acknowledging where we came from.

In preserving our past, we need to concentrate not on just a few singular landmarks, but on neighborhoods as well. Most buildings in any community are of a rather ordinary nature. They may not be great works of architecture, nor buildings in which any great event occurred or an import-

ant person lived. However, the buildings in old neighborhoods -the ordinary along with the extraordinary- often give stronger evidence of a community's history than individual landmarks can. It is here that people lived and gave expression to their past, giving us a clear indication of where our roots lie.

### **The Planning Process**

"Historic preservation" is a general term encompassing a broad range of activities - from the simple protection of a historic resource to rehabilitation and, ultimately, complete restoration. It can be applied to everything from mansions to bungalows to Native American mounds to brick streets. Preservation is also defined as the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property or structure. Its intent is to protect and stabilize the property, and generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction. This includes sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional within a preservation project.

According to the National Park Service, historic preservation is a conversation with our past about our future. It provides us with opportunities to ask, "What is important in our history?" and "What parts of our past can we preserve for the future?" Through historic preservation, we look at history in different ways, ask different questions of the past, and learn new things about our history and ourselves. Historic preservation is an important way for us to transmit our understanding of the past to future generations.<sup>iii</sup> Ultimately, this is done through sound and practical policy, of which is outlined in detail in the plan.

The purpose of the Historic Preservation Plan is to define the relative roles of the city and the commission in encouraging historic preservation; to provide guidelines for the designation of landmarks and historic districts; to educate the public; and to recommend those actions which can be undertaken by the city and/or the commission to further private efforts to preserve historic sites and structures, including proposals for several new historic districts. When adopted, these policies, guidelines, and recommendations will offer a rational way to protect, evaluate, and enhance Rockford's historic resources for the benefit of present and future residents. By integrating protection of historic resources into the normal process of city government and by educating the public as to the value of these resources, the city can help ensure preservation of Rockford's architectural heritage.

### **Survey & Inventory of Historic Properties**

The city submitted an application for a CLG Grant in 2021 to conduct a multiple property survey of all industrial buildings constructed between 1850 and 1930. The city was awarded that grant and hired a historic consultant to perform this work. This survey was recently completed and was a huge step forward in achieving our goals.

The residential structures would be the next logical step as soon as funding sources can be made available. Criteria were developed for rating each item in the inventory in accordance with standards of the U.S. Department of the Interior for landmark designation.

### **Historic properties fall within one of the following categories:**

**Rank 1** properties are eligible to be Rockford landmarks and to be on the National Register of Historic Places.

**Rank 2** properties are also eligible to be Rockford landmarks and may be eligible for the National Register.

**Rank 3** properties are important properties in a historic district, and they may be eligible for local landmark status or to be on the National Register if new, significant historical information about them comes to light.

**Rank 0** and compatible properties are buildings that contribute to the character of a historic district.

For more detailed information about the ranking process, please see the City of Rockford Historic Preservation Plan.

### **Existing City Landmark Properties**

Any person or organization - including the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) - may request that a building, place, or area be designated a landmark. It is the applicant's responsibility to demonstrate convincingly to the commission the applicability of one or more criteria outlined in the plan, providing ample documentation to support all statements and assertions. After it has received a complete application for landmark designation of a property, the commission holds a public hearing on the matter to make a determination for eligibility.

Currently, there are 28 sites designated as local landmarks.



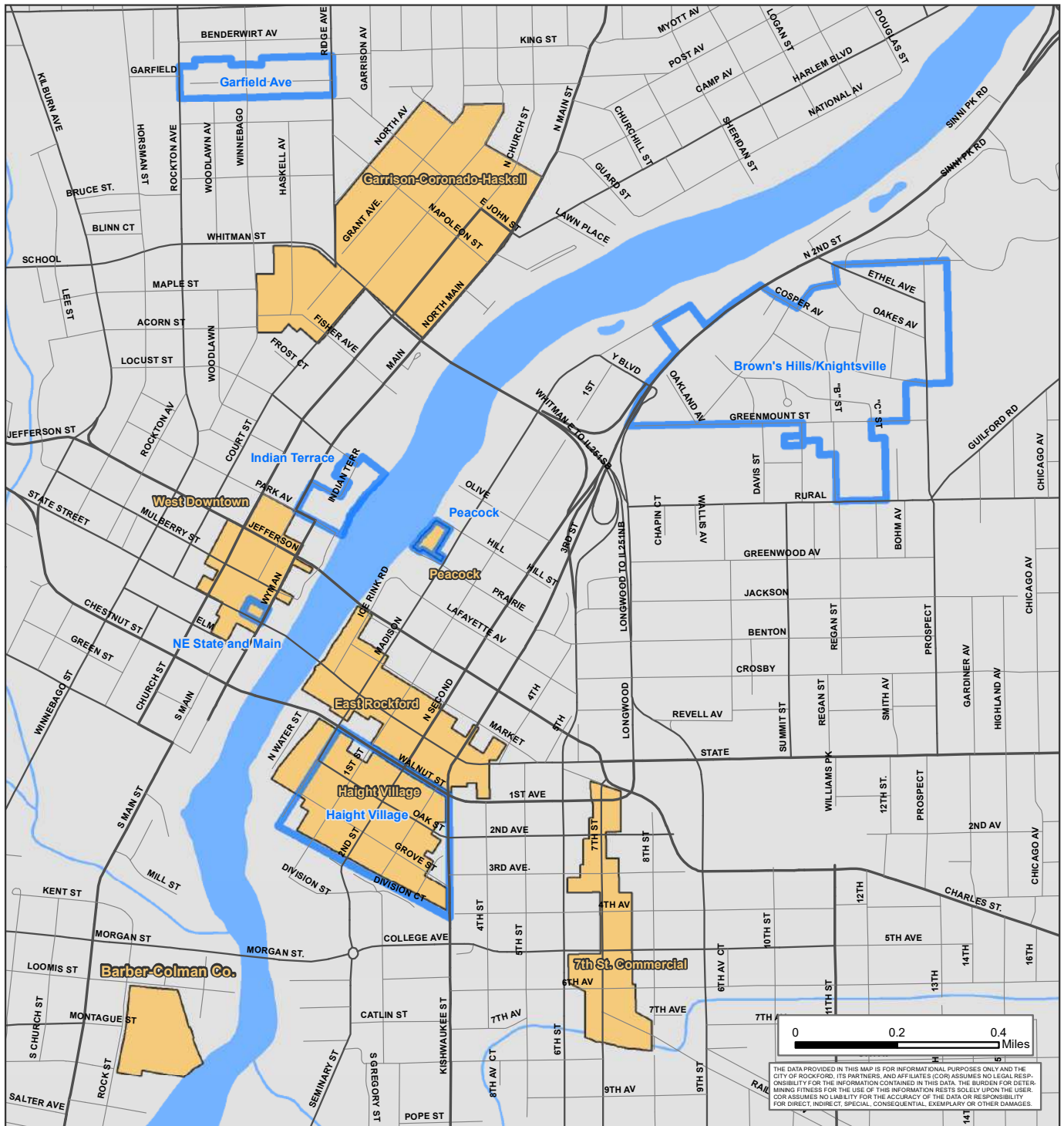
# Local Historic Districts 2021

City of Rockford



Map Produced: June 2021





# Historic Districts & National Register Districts 2021

City of Rockford



Existing Historic District

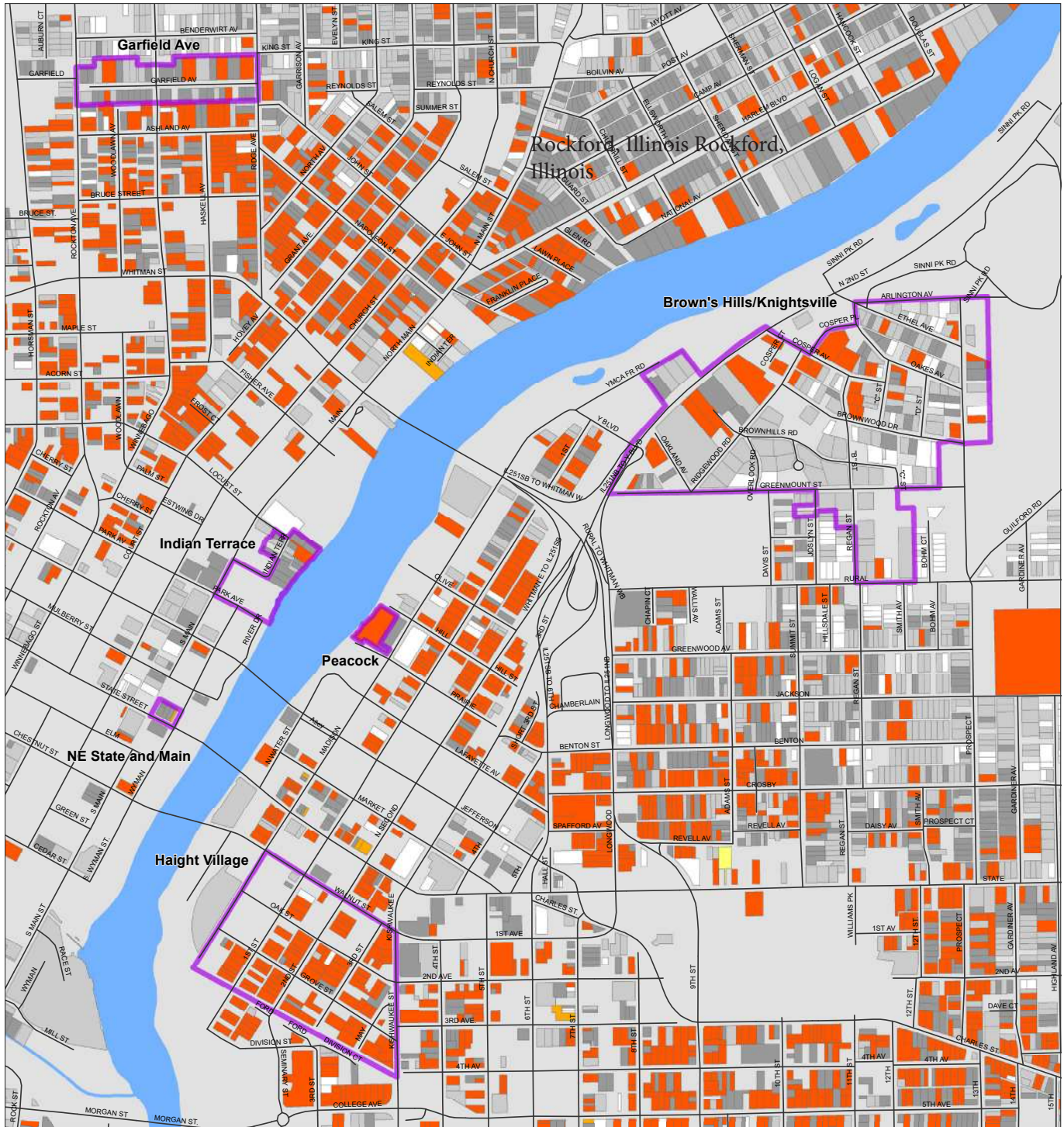


National Register District

N



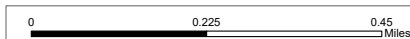
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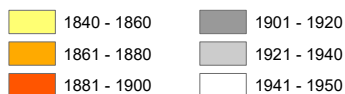
# Historic Districts 2021

Showing Year Structure was Built

THE DATA PROVIDED IN THIS MAP IS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY AND THE CITY OF ROCKFORD, ITS PARTNERS, AND AFFILIATES (COR) ASSUMES NO LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS DATA. THE BURDEN FOR DETERMINING FITNESS FOR THE USE OF THIS INFORMATION RESTS SOLELY UPON THE USER. COR ASSUMES NO LIABILITY FOR THE ACCURACY OF THE DATA OR RESPONSIBILITY FOR DIRECT, INDIRECT, SPECIAL, CONSEQUENTIAL, EXEMPLARY OR OTHER DAMAGES.



## Original Construction Date



Existing Historic District



Map Produced: June 2021



Housing Analysis & Current Housing Market

The key to understating the current housing market in Rockford is first understanding the demographic characteristics of its residents. According to the U.S. Census, the total population of Rockford in 2019 was 147,070, and 148,655 in 2020 for the Decennial U.S. Census. Overall, the population has become more diverse in its racial composition in recent decades. In the past ten years, the white population has declined by 22 percent, while the Black or African-American and Asian-American populations, increased by 9 percent and 17 percent, respectively. At a time when overall population is in a decline, the minority populations continue to grow. The Hispanic population has grown by 23 percent between 2010 and 2019, and between 1990-2019 (30 years) the Hispanic or Latino population grew from just over 5,000 people to just over 29,500; this is a 468% increase.

Another important characteristic to examine in relationship to housing is income and poverty. In 2019, the median household income was \$44,252. However, there were substantial differences in the median income among the city’s racial and ethnic groups. Median household income is highest among the Asian (\$52,695) and White (\$50,058) households. Hispanic or Latino households had a median household income of only \$40,476, while Black or African-American households have the lowest median incomes of any racial group at just under \$30,000. Poverty status and employment has remained relatively stable between 2010 and 2019, with persons below poverty decreasing by one percent and employment increasing by 0.6 percent in Rockford.

Poverty Levels	1990	2000	2010	2019
Population below poverty level	13%	18%	23%	22%
Under 18 years below poverty level	20%	35%	37%	34%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Overall, the total number of housing units in Rockford has decreased by approximately three percent between 2010 and 2019. According to the U.S. Census, the city had a total of 66,469 housing units in 2019. The majority of single family housing units are located outside of the city center. Housing density decreases the further out from downtown and closer to the city limits you travel; where the development of single-family housing on larger lots has occurred, while downtown contains more mixed-use development and multi-family units. According to recent data from the 2020 Decennial Census, there was a small increase in the total number of housing units and there are now an estimated 66,612 units, of which 6,422 are vacant

structures. This is a slight decrease, from 10.4 percent to 9.6 percent in the overall rate of vacant housing units. At the same time, the number of units increased as well. This is outlined in more detail below.

Of the total number of housing units in 2019, 89.6 percent were recorded as occupied, with 10.4 percent being listed as vacant. Looking at occupancy rates within the city, downtown has the lowest occupancy rates, while the east side of the city has highest number of units occupied. When looking at vacancy rates within the city over time, the homeowner vacancy rate has increased from 1.3 percent in 2010 to 1.9 percent in 2019, while the rental vacancy rate has increased more significantly from 4.2 percent in 2010 to 7.0 percent in 2019. Overall, the total number of vacant units increased by about 10 percent during that time. As mentioned, the homeowner vacancy is concentrated near downtown, with some areas having up to a nine percent vacancy rate. In contrast, rental vacancy is concentrated in the northwest portion of the city, with some areas having over a 20 percent vacancy rate. Although there appears to be an adequate supply of housing units available, the available units may not meet the price or type of housing needed by Rockford residents currently looking. There is also a lot of turnover with tenants.

Housing Occupancy	2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Occupied housing units	59,827	87%	59,551	90%
Vacant housing units	8,930	13%	6,918	10%
Total housing units	68,757	100%	66,469	100%

Source: U.S. Census. American Community Survey: 5-Year Estimates. Table: DP04

Additionally, the housing stock in Rockford is aging and many of these aging housing units are not being sufficiently maintained. A majority of Rockford’s housing stock was built well before 1970, with the largest percentage of housing units built in 1939 or earlier (21.9 percent). Homes built prior to 1939 are mostly concentrated west of downtown along the Rock River and along East State Street. Only one percent of the city’s housing stock was built in 2010 or later. Homes built after 2010 are located in the northern, eastern, and southern most areas of the city, near the city limits, usually as new multi-family development projects. The city recognizes that the housing stock is currently insufficient for proper population growth. There have been concerted efforts and steps taken over the last decade to eliminate some of the most blighted housing units. However, infill has yet to occur in these areas. The city will continue to address the topic of blighted properties to reduce the need to demo them in the first place, and to rebuild where demo does occur.



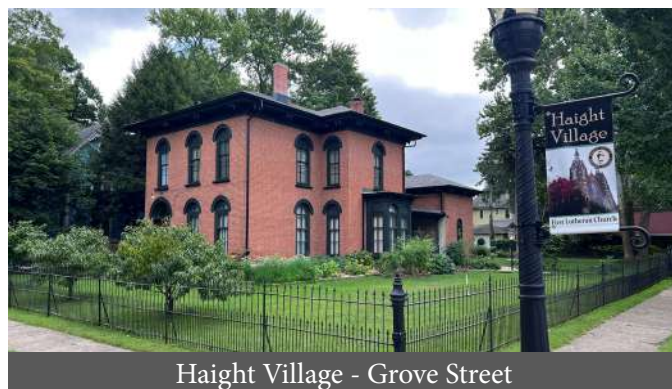
Date of Housing Construction	2010		2019	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Built 2010 or later	-	-	668	1%
Built 2000 to 2009	4,101	6%	3,783	6%
Built 1990 to 1999	5,258	8%	5,653	9%
Built 1980 to 1989	5,723	8%	5,516	8%
Built 1970 to 1979	7,850	11%	9,208	14%
Built 1960 to 1969	10,986	16%	10,663	16%
Built 1950 to 1959	12,491	18%	10,633	16%
Built 1940 to 1949	6,284	9%	5,742	9%
Built 1939 or earlier	16,064	23%	14,603	22%
Total housing units	68,757	-	66,469	-

Source: U.S. Census. American Community Survey. 5-Year Estimates. Table: DP04

## Housing Type

There continues to be a need for additional single-family detached homes and starter housing in Rockford that is more recently built or rehabilitated. During the past two decades and especially the past ten years, new housing development on the edge of the city's built-up area has been primarily of the "starter home" variety. While this led to a slight increase in home ownership rates from 1990 to 2000 (60 percent versus 61 percent), it also has led to two major problems. First, it tended to increase the rental vacancy rate as renters moved to owning a home or renting newer units, leaving behind more marginal units. The second problem to arise is that with the majority of new construction being starter homes, there is little choice for the "move-up buyer" or more affluent buyers. These "move-up buyers" have instead been moving outside the city for other markets such as Boone County, the Village of Roscoe, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Timberlane, and others. This loss of the more affluent home buyers shows in some of the demographic trends for Rockford from 1990 to 2000, especially. There is a need for new developments to offer a wide range of choice for buyers wishing to move up from starter homes while staying within the City of Rockford. The city would like to attract these new, more affluent developments to balance the housing choice and demographics, while also investing in more market rate units and starter homes as mentioned. This balance of choice is important for a healthy and fair housing market.

In more recent years, partially as a result of COVID-19, housing prices have increased dramatically and created a situation where homes are selling much higher than a few years ago. This has also created an increase in the number of properties being rehabilitated and sold after extensive renovations, bringing the home back to the tax-base for the city. Due to this, the City of Rockford leadership has been able to not increase property taxes in some time.



A summary of housing characteristics (2019) within the City of Rockford are provided below.

Of the occupied housing units, 32,305 were owner-occupied units (54.2 percent) and 27,246 were renter-occupied units (45.8 percent).

65 percent of the housing stock in Rockford were single-family units, both detached and attached. The remaining housing units are multi-family dwelling units ranging from buildings with two units (9.3 percent) up to buildings with ten or more units (10.2 percent).

According to HUD, fair market rents in Rockford increased over the last decade for all unit types. Four-bedroom apartments have seen the largest jump in fair market rent, with an increase of 23.2 percent, while efficiency units have the smallest increase in cost at 6 percent.

Within Rockford, 7.5 percent of individuals over the age of 18 years have difficulty living independently because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition and may have difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping. The largest age group with difficulty living alone are individuals over the age of 65.

## Home Values

Home values have decreased in Rockford from 2010 to 2019. For example, the median home value has decreased from \$109,100 to \$92,600 between 2010 and 2019. In 2019, most homes in Rockford were valued between \$50,000 and \$99,999 (40.9 percent). The number of homes valued at less than \$50,000 has doubled from 2,484 to 4,675 from 2010 to 2019. Homes valued at less than \$50,000 are primarily located in the west and southwest portions of the city. Alternatively, homes valued between \$50,000 and \$99,000 are concentrated along East State Street and Charles Street.

However, as just mentioned, home values have increased over recent years as a result of COVID-19, and inflation.

## Housing Needs, Current & Future

### Cost Burden of Housing

When a household experiences a cost burden, it means that 30 percent or more of the household income is going to housing costs. This includes utilities, interest, taxes, insurance, property maintenance and upkeep, as well as the direct cost of either rent or a mortgage. A severely cost burdened household pays 50 percent or more of its household income on housing. This burden is not only an individual problem, but it can cause serious problems in a community. For renters, any particular economic setback could cause the household to fall behind in rental payments, thereby becoming at-risk of eviction and homelessness. For homeowners, it could be a lack of sufficient resources to conduct routine and periodic maintenance on their homes.

**The following statistics highlight some of the cost burdens within the City of Rockford.**

Overall, the number of households with cost burdens has decreased between 2010 (40.3 percent) and 2019 (33.7 percent). Cost burden households paying rent also decreased between 2010 and 2019, from 55.4 percent to 50.0 percent. This means there has been a decrease in the number of households paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing. While these numbers have decreased, there is still a large portion (19,398) of households who are cost burdened and likely have trouble affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.

There has been an 18 percent increase in occupied units paying rent from 2010 to 2019. Looking at gross rent as a percentage of income, 41.3 percent of renters in Rockford spent 35 percent or more of their income on rent in 2019. While the percentage of cost burdened renters has decreased from 2010 to 2019, the number of renters who spend 35 percent or more of their income on rent has actually increased.

Median monthly housing costs have decreased by 5.8 percent between 2010 (\$1,186) and 2019 (\$1,117). A mortgage cost about \$1,000 to \$1,499 a month in Rockford. Owner-occupied units make up the largest category of units with an active mortgage at just over 38 percent. A monthly mortgage cost of \$1,000 to \$1,499 is roughly 27 to 41 percent of Rockford's median household income of \$44,252. Therefore, there are many households potentially cost burdened to pay their mortgage, and more importantly many individuals and are at the tipping point.

### Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is one approach to lower the cost burden of households. Affordable housing comes in many different forms and programs. Moreover, stakeholders are still learning about what works for their community-at-large or subsections of their community. As such, there is a range of concerns associated with affordable housing including program structure and funding issues, as well as the construction and maintenance of affordable housing structures. Affordable housing can also concentrate poverty, leading to further equity issues. On the public engagement side, new affordable housing projects can bring controversy, as some members of the public have preconceived notions of programs that have failed in the past. Politically, affordable housing projects can struggle to gain public and constituent approval due to many programs remaining a cost, rather than a revenue generator. Specific to Rockford, one burden (mentioned earlier) is that many affordable homes in the area require rehabilitation, which is not always feasible for low-income or first-time homebuyers, who may lack the funds or skills to do it themselves.

Generally, the Midwest has a more positive history of affordable living standards compared to other parts of the United States. Rockford is reflective of this relative affordability. In 2017, Rockford was ranked in the top seven percent of most affordable places in the United States, with home prices 60 percent lower than the national average.<sup>iv</sup> In addition to naturally occurring affordability, there are a variety of programs and organizations in Rockford to assist residents finding affordable housing, including the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA). While housing is relatively affordable in Rockford, the limited supply of rental housing has increased the need for more affordable and well maintained units. Additionally, many affordable homes are aging and require rehabilitation, which can be a barrier for first-time and lower income home buyers.

Affordable housing is important as it fosters a diverse economy and workforce by supporting community members across all income levels. Affordable housing also promotes safe, stable options for community members, which can increase overall community health, boost childhood development, and reduce emergency healthcare utilization because basic needs have been met in a stable, healthy environment. Additionally, affordable housing allows families and individuals of varying income levels to live closer to work and are then able to spend less of their income on housing costs. Flexibility for affordable housing developments are needed to promote and sustain a diverse

housing stock today, as well as for future growth in our region.



Carol Place - New Residential Construction

### Special Needs Housing

Special needs housing refers to housing for the disabled, elderly, homeless, and other non-traditional housing needs. Special housing needs are important to track to inform programming and planning initiatives. Between 2010 and 2019, Rockford has seen an increase of 15.2 percent in individuals over the age of 65. This increases the need for housing for elderly and retired persons, especially when much of the regions special housing is aging and deteriorating. Many of these individuals will be on limited incomes and may not have the desire or ability to take care of the homes they live in now as they continue to age.

However, Christopher Williamson, AICP reports in his article, "The War of the Ages", that Baby Boomer household incomes are \$10,000-\$15,000 higher than median incomes, and that home ownership will be the rule as the Census tells us that home ownership increases with age. He also states: "Baby boomers have three choices when they retire: Stay in their current homes, move locally, or leave the area. And they may move several times after age 65. Each choice has consequences for local planning."

Baby Boomers may be drawn to active adult retirement communities popular in the Southern and Western United States. The city should encourage these types of retirement developments to retain our aging higher income population, as well as attract retirees from surrounding areas and nearby Chicago. Another type of retirement community gaining popularity is a Continuing Care Retirement Community, or CCRC, as reported by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). These communities offer a variety of services depending on the care required by the individual. A CCRC community may include in-

dependent living units, assisted living units, and nursing home accommodations. The city should try to accommodate these types of developments more, and also support partnerships between these communities and institutions such as local hospitals and other social services/support.

Furthermore, an estimate of 15.5 percent of Rockford's population has a disability. The largest age group of individuals with a disability are those over the age of 65. Those living with a disability are largely concentrated near downtown Rockford where several assisted living facilities are located. Many of the individuals living below the poverty level are located in areas where the housing stock is much older, particularly near the city center due to the lower costs. However, older homes may lack some of the amenities needed by people with a disability, such as ramps or wider hallways and doorways, and proper bathrooms. Additionally, a significant number of individuals with a disability, 26 percent, are living below the poverty level. Individuals at or above poverty level with a disability are mostly concentrated in the northern and southern-most portions of the city.

### Addressing Housing Needs

Fair housing has a variety of components including education, enforcement, and legislation. HUD awards funding associated with their programs to local and state jurisdictions to address housing issues. The City of Rockford's Community and Economic Development Department: Neighborhood Development Division, conducts these programs and associated reporting activities. This division's role in affordability is through their programs that expand affordable housing opportunities via conducting housing rehabilitation, housing assistance, and home ownership programs.<sup>v</sup> This division also writes a series of reports required by HUD. In addition to recognizing the federal fair housing standards, the city also has a local fair housing ordinance, prohibiting discrimination for specific protected classes.

### Consolidation Plan FY 2020-2024

The City of Rockford has created a consolidation plan to fulfill a HUD requirement as an Entitlement Community. The Consolidated Plan describes the community's housing and economic development needs, provides strategies to address those needs and how Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program, and Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) funds will be used over the next 5 years.<sup>vi</sup> This document serves as a strategic plan for the federal programs the city conducts related to housing, community, and economic development.<sup>vii</sup> The Consolidated Plan is designed to assess



affordable housing, community development needs, market conditions, as well as make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. The consolidated planning process serves as the framework for a community-wide dialogue to identify housing and community development priorities that align and focus funding from the formula block grant programs mentioned above.

One goal in the City of Rockford Fiscal Year 2020-2024 Five-Year Consolidated Plan as it relates to affordability is to increase the supply of affordable, accessible, decent, safe, and sanitary housing for the elderly, persons with disabilities, persons with HIV/AIDS, victims of domestic violence, persons with alcohol/drug dependency, and persons with other special needs through rehabilitation of existing buildings and new construction.<sup>viii</sup>

The City of Rockford Annual Action Plan results from the Consolidation Plan and details the city's proposed HUD-funded activities during the program year.<sup>ix</sup> This document summarizes the actions, activities, and resources used to address the needs and achieve the goals outlined in the Consolidation Plan.<sup>x</sup>

**In addition to the City of Rockford Five-Year Consolidated Plan, it also provides the following services or programs to its residents:**

**Water Hookup Program:** This program aids single-family homeowner's transition from well water to city water. Participants must reside within city limits, occupy the single-family home in question, and meet specific income criteria.<sup>xi</sup>

**Community Gardens:** In an effort to reduce food insecurity, support is provided for community gardens created in low-income neighborhoods with active neighborhood involvement.<sup>xii</sup>

**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP):** LIHEAP pays a benefit directly to utilities or energy vendors on behalf of eligible households, or directly to eligible renters if all energy costs are included in their rent.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Home-buyer Assistance Program:** The Home-buyer Assistance program provides financial assistance to make the purchase of a home more affordable to income-eligible homebuyers. The city will determine the amount of financial assistance, up to a program maximum of \$14,999, based on the applicant's income, debt, and anticipated mortgage.<sup>xiv</sup>

**HOME Investment Partnerships:** The city receives HOME (HOME Investment Partnerships Program), a formula grant from HUD to fund building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership. It is the largest Federal block grant to state and local governments designed exclusively to create housing for low-income households.<sup>xv</sup>

**Minor Rehab Housing Program:** This program provides up to \$25,000 for households that meet the city's outlined income criteria. Projects include accessibility improvements, external, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing issues.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Roof Replacement Program:** This program offers financial assistance for new roofs to homeowners that meet program criteria.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Partnerships**

Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) is a key partner with the city in addressing housing needs, especially regarding local fair housing efforts. RHA is a local authority established to provide affordable housing to lower income Americans through operating housing and assistance programs under HUD's direction. It is governed by a board of five commissioners who are appointed to staggered five-year terms by the Mayor of the City of Rockford. Board officers are elected annually by majority vote of the Board of Commissioners. The RHA employs a staff of approximately 64 personnel who perform a variety of functions necessary to service its residents and maintain its housing stock. This entity directly provides more affordable housing opportunities through subsidized housing to the areas eligible clients.<sup>xviii</sup>

**Some of RHA's more well-known and utilized programs are detailed below:**

**HUD Section 3 Job Bank:** RHA has created a job bank database for residents of the Rockford Housing Authority and residents of the metropolitan area to self-certify as low-income or very low-income individuals. Residents who have self-certified their income status will receive notifications about jobs available to them. RHA works with vendors and contractors to build an employment base for job seekers.<sup>xix</sup>

**Resident Services Department:** The Resident Services department of RHA helps residents with re-entry into the workforce, career help, budgeting skills, service coordination, and overall support as needed.<sup>xx</sup>

Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8): Eligible families receive a housing subsidy while leasing from the private market. The program offers location choices within RHA's housing boundary. Recipients still must go through the approval process every renter goes through. Rules and regulations are determined by HUD.<sup>xxi</sup>

## Vacant Housing Efforts

As of 2020, approximately 9.6 percent of Rockford's housing stock was vacant. Vacant housing units are largely concentrated near downtown Rockford and W. State Street. Housing vacancies can increase for a variety of reasons including economic hardship and area changes. The consequences of vacant housing include squatting, utility degradation, costly renovations or remediation efforts, lower property values, less city revenue in the form of property taxes, and increased community upkeep. Mitigating vacant housing is especially important in housing market prices, cost of living, infrastructure maintenance, and property values. Reducing vacant housing also reduces blight and fosters a more resilient property tax revenue base.

As mentioned, rehabilitation of vacant houses can be a major contributing factor in reducing the number of vacant housing units overall. As Rockford's housing stock is aging, rehabilitation can be quite difficult and costly for many residents. Making rehabilitation an easier and less costly process should be a goal of the city. Some homes in poor condition may have an opportunity for rehabilitation, but it can be time consuming and quite costly. Lead abatement, zoning, code compliance, and historic preservation can make the rehabilitation process not as cost ef-

fective as most would assume. In some instances, the only solution for a vacant home may be demolition; however, this could negatively affect a neighborhood unless infill strategies are created and implemented along with demolition efforts.

## Initiatives to Combat Vacant Housing

The City of Rockford's Community and Economic Development Department works in a variety of areas to combat vacant housing, but primarily through the Rental, Vacant, and Foreclosing Property Registration programs. The purpose of the Vacant and Foreclosed Property Registry (VFPR) is to provide the City of Rockford an additional tool to fight against the spread of blight in neighborhoods and commercial corridors. With nearly 128,000 parcels throughout the city, tracking and ensuring that the city has information to communicate with persons and companies responsible for the maintenance of the property is a significant endeavor.<sup>xxii</sup> In order to comply with the vacant and foreclosed property registration ordinances, all property owners of vacant properties and mortgagees of foreclosed properties must register online via PROCHAMPS.com and pay a registration fee.

Another program used by the city to combat vacant housing and blight is the Mow to Own and Improve Program. Under this program, property owners residing adjacent to vacant, residential lots may acquire and maintain this property, by bringing it up to code in a specific time frame (usually about three years), in exchange for a reduced sale price. The Mow to Own and Improve Program is designed to help adjacent property owners acquire vacant lots and improve neighborhoods, while decreasing the city's maintenance burden.<sup>xxiii</sup> The benefits of these programs are quality of life improvements, more specifically increased accessibility and safety, increased property values, and supporting and improving the overall community health.

## Regional Land Bank & Trustee Program

Region 1 Planning Council (R1PC) is a special-purpose, regional government agency that promotes collaboration among local governments by working across the jurisdictional silos of states, counties, and municipalities. The RPC supports the city's vacant housing efforts through the Land Bank Program. This program takes legally abandoned properties to sell at a tax sale. This program aims to reduce the deterioration of resources, mitigate blight, and get properties back on tax rolls. Another similar program is the Winnebago County Trustee Program. As the Trustee agent, RPC assists in selling Trustee (publicly owned) parcels through their online sales system.<sup>xxiv</sup>



Example of Property in Danger of Demolition

## Land Bank

The Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority helps alleviate blight throughout Rockford by acquiring abandoned property, then clearing the title through the court abandonment process, and selling the property to a qualified buyer.<sup>xxv</sup> One of the Land Bank's most useful tools is its ability to provide a clear title to new purchasers. Land bank properties are typically those with value-diminishing back-taxes or other liens and liabilities tied to the property, which prevents it from being sold on the private market. Through a judicial deed process, the Land Bank can acquire abandoned property, then leverage its legal ability to clear the title, and find a qualified buyer for the property.

In Winnebago County alone, more than 1,000 properties each year qualify as legally abandoned under Illinois State Statute. These properties sit at length, often many years, vacant and deteriorating. With a Land Bank, properties may be acquired and returned to market at a higher market value in a more efficient and cost-effective manner, putting an end to the vicious cycle of declining equalized assessed valuations.

The Land Bank also gives local governments more control over abandoned properties in their communities. The Land Bank is run by a Board of Trustees, comprised of representatives from all member counties and municipalities. This board approves sales of properties to qualified buyers who adhere to the goal of the board, which ultimately is targeted community development efforts. The property deed is then transferred to the buyer with a deed restriction, stating the buyer will rehabilitate the property to code within a certain time period. Through the typical auction process, communities have no authority over who purchases the properties or what they do with the properties after they are acquired.

## Winnebago County Trustee Program

The Winnebago County Trustee program is another effort to reduce vacant properties within the city. This program acquires tax delinquent properties through Winnebago County's tax sale process. All properties acquired by the Trustee program are properties which were not bought at the sale and defaulted to the Trustee. The Trustee is then tasked with selling these properties to the general public. Both this program and the Land Bank program help strengthen property taxes as a revenue source by getting vacant properties back on the tax rolls. Properties in the County Trustee Program, by state statute, are publicly-owned parcels. Winnebago County has contracted the RPC to sell the parcels, reduce the inventory of the pro-

gram, and return properties to productive use.

RIPC sells these parcels through an online auction style sale.<sup>xxvi</sup> Parcels for sale begin at a minimum bid of \$500 for a vacant lot and \$1,000 for parcels with a structure. Properties are available online for review, along with an application for purchase. When applying, all applicants are required to describe their planned use for the property. Bids are visible on the sales site and updated regularly to reflect the highest bid. The initial bid period date is subject to change.

In 2017, 4,323 properties went to the tax sale in Winnebago County. By comparison, there were 1,998 in Peoria County, 805 in Champaign County, and 1,560 in Sangamon County that went to the tax sale. Although not all tax sale properties are vacant and abandoned, it is a benchmark for comparison as well as an indicator of neighborhood and economic condition.

## Homelessness Reduction Efforts

Recognizing and addressing homelessness is important for overall community health and cost management. High levels of homelessness in a community can lower quality of life, and put a strain on a community's public health and safety resources. For example, a subset of the homeless population, those that are chronically homeless, are high utilizers of emergency services. This cost is often passed down to the residents through the use of tax dollars. In addition to resource utilization issues, homelessness can be, or contribute to, public health issues related to lack of access to restrooms and waste disposal. Homelessness is a complex issue with no easy solutions. There are a variety of factors that contribute to why an individual experiences homelessness, and in turn, a variety of complementary strategies to prevent or reduce homelessness. Addressing homelessness can often be burdened by capacity and funding issues, and is often a controversial issue. This only makes the topic more difficult to alleviate.

The City of Rockford's Community Services Division conducts a variety of programs to combat homelessness. This division serves as a single-entry point for individuals experiencing homelessness to seek resources. This allows for increased coordination between resource providers and creates a clearer journey to housing for individuals. The city has had two aggressive homelessness initiatives that have been very successful, including the Zero 2016 Ending Veteran Homelessness (achieved on December 15, 2015) and the Zero 2017 Ending Chronic Homelessness initiatives (achieved on December 31, 2017).



Additionally, the Northern Illinois Homeless Coalition (formerly the Rock River Homeless Coalition) is housed within the Community Services Division and serves as the local Continuum of Care for Winnebago and Boone Counties.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Northern Illinois Homeless Coalition is a partnership of dedicated volunteers, non-profit agencies, public entities, businesses, and faith-based organizations who work together to help households experiencing homelessness receive services they need while following a housing first philosophy. This coalition contributes to homelessness reduction efforts by connecting community members to specific resources that meet their needs. Coalition activities include collaborative planning and coordination regarding resources, data collection, performance measures, and activities reflective of regional values and standards.<sup>xxviii</sup> The benefits of addressing homelessness include improving community quality of life, and reducing burdens on hospitals (mainly emergency rooms) and taxpayers. Since 2015, the coalition has helped more than 400 households move into permanent housing.<sup>xxix</sup>

**Rockford has a variety of local programs through government and non-profit coordination that address homelessness, including:**

**Emergency Solutions Grants Program-** This program assists people who are at-risk or currently experiencing homelessness by supporting efforts to coordinate housing support and related services. Funds can be used for rapid rehousing, homeless prevention, street outreach, providing emergency shelter, and for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).<sup>xxx</sup>

**Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) Program-** This is the only Federal program dedicated to the housing needs of people living with HIV/AIDS. Under the HOPWA Program, HUD makes grants to local communities, states, and nonprofit organizations for projects that benefit low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families.<sup>xxxi</sup>

**Condemnation Relocation-** This program assists persons whose housing has been condemned with one-month payment of rent at a new location.<sup>xxxii</sup>

**Foster Youth Housing Assistance Program-** Aimed at youth who have aged out of foster care aged 18-21 who are either homeless or having problems, this program provides them with the support and services to find housing opportunities; no referral is needed. These same services are available to Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) involved families with a referral from their case-

worker.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

**Homeless Prevention-** This program assists persons who have experienced a short-term crisis beyond their control with rent or mortgage assistance to remain housed.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

**Rapid Rehousing-** The goal of this program is to assist people who are living on the streets or in shelters find housing.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Department of Health and Human Services - Community Services Division City of Rockford.

## **Neighborhood Improvement Initiative**

On March 11th, 2022, the City of Rockford Mayor, Tom McNamara, announced a new Neighborhood Improvement Initiative. This new city initiative aimed to flood six neighborhoods with resources and services designed to improve both the look of the area and quality of life for residents. The Neighborhood Improvement Initiative continued throughout the summer and focused on six neighborhoods selected because they have been negatively affected by crime, and could benefit from being connected to various community resources and services.

A team of city employees, community partners, and volunteers flocked to neighborhoods on specific dates to make improvements to the overall environment, including streetlights and sidewalks.

“We’re trying to change the built environment of these neighborhoods,” and “We’re going to be improving streets, we’re going to be improving sidewalks, we’re going to have our forestry department out there working to trim back trees, we’re going to make sure that the lighting is good in those neighborhoods. We’re going to put all of our physical resources that we can into those neighborhoods,” Mayor McNamara said.

At the end of each volunteer workday, residents were invited and brought together for a block party with food and other activities free of charge.

The goal is to help residents build relationships, improve their neighborhoods appearance, and reduce crime.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## HOUSING

### Encourage new residential home construction

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Wave, or reduce, utility hook-up fees	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Develop relationships with builders and architects who could potentially construct multiple homes on one street or block that are vacant or properties that have no structure due to demolition	\$\$	Short	Medium
Install utilities (water, sewer, stormwater, electric) to spur new development	\$\$\$\$	Long	Medium
Develop some sort of housing subsidies or incentives to build new single, and multi-family dwelling units that are modern	\$\$\$	Medium	Low

### Continue to create opportunities for rehabilitation

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Promote and expand housing preservation and rehabilitation incentive programs	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Develop a vacant housing online database and market incentives available for property repurposing to young adult professionals	\$	Short	High
Provide housing options that support aging-in-place and accessory housing units	\$\$	Short	High
Align resources for residential property landscaping beautification	\$\$	Medium	Low
Maintain a housing inspection program that can identify housing units trending toward decline or identifiable substandard housing issues	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue with low-income home rehabilitation program including roof and window replacement	\$\$	Short	High

### Continue demolition of abandoned properties that are past the point of rehab

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify demolished properties suitable for public art projects and urban agriculture/community gardens	\$\$	Short	High
Rehabilitation is preferred if at all possible	\$\$\$	Long	Low
Need a plan to rebuild after demolition to reduce additional vacant lots	\$\$	Short	Medium
Work to recoup costs associated with unsafe property demolition from current owners	\$\$	Short	High

Enable a range of housing affordability within existing and new neighborhoods			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Target new senior housing development with high connectivity and access to essential services	\$\$	Short	High
Consider existing poverty levels within an area before development begins by reviewing successful existing affordable housing developments nearby	\$	Medium	High
Encourage transit-oriented development near train stations and along major transit routes	\$\$\$	Short	Medium
Prioritize mixed-use, new, affordable, and accessible housing in areas that offer good access to transportation, employment, and public amenities	\$	Short	Low
Preserve culturally, historically, and architecturally significant residential homes			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Implement the recently updated Rockford Historic Preservation Plan	\$\$	Short	High
Complete and implement findings of comprehensive survey of historic places	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue with an active Historic Preservation Committee	\$	Short	High
Continue working with neighborhood groups and preservation groups	\$	Short	High
Reduce number of absentee-ownership properties			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify Community Development Organizations to acquire tax foreclosed properties	\$	Long	Low
Integrate enforcement with other abandonment prevention strategies through housing infill and rehabilitation	\$	Short	Medium
Establish a direct marketing campaign for the city's housing tax incentive programs	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Develop parks and open space within existing and new neighborhood development			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify vacant land or soon-to-be demolished properties to expand parks and recreation opportunities near new neighborhood developments	\$\$\$	Long	Medium
Require developers to install playgrounds in new developments, subdivisions, or Planned Unit Developments (PUD)	\$	Short	High
Improve access and availability of essential services within neighborhood commercial corridors and centers			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify obsolete industrial sites suitable for adaptive reuse that could incorporate mixed use development	\$	Medium	Low



Promote a compatible mix of land uses that create a diversified environment for living, shopping, recreation, and employment	\$	Medium	Low
<b>Increase community engagement opportunities in neighborhood and focus area planning</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Incorporate online social media tools in all phases of planning	\$	Long	Low
Use evaluation tools for collective feedback on established community involvement processes both from the city and participants perspectives	\$	Long	Medium
<b>Rockford neighborhoods should be safe, cohesive, and either stable or improving in condition</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Coordinate with neighborhood groups and associations to determine each areas needs and wants	\$	Medium	Low
<b>Continue Implementing Land Bank Trustee Program</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Work on way to give properties to adjacent land owner that are not able to sell through the land bank program	\$	Short	High
Very small parcels, slivers, land-locked parcels, etc. should be given to adjacent land owner to get back on tax records	\$	Short	High
Develop a plan to either rebuild properties that are vacant or sell to adjacent landowners	\$\$	Short	Medium
<b>Continue Implementing Mow to Own Program</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
City owned property, sign up for Mow to Own Program (3-4 year on sales)	\$	Short	High
Housing Study focusing on In-Fill development in low-income areas, especially on vacant properties, recently demo'd properties, etc.	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Implement innovative financing approaches. Reduction of fees, utility infrastructure costs, need to get creative	\$\$	Long	Low

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## COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE, PUBLIC SAFETY & HEALTH

### Introduction & Background

Community Infrastructure refers to the physical framework of facilities and amenities that are considered to be necessary to support and comfortably sustain a community of people to live and work. This would include roads and bridges, public transportation, sidewalks, medical facilities, schools, parks and public spaces, sports and recreational facilities, water supply, stormwater management, garbage and recycling, electricity, and natural gas supply.

Along these same lines is the interest in local government to keep its citizens safe from crime, natural disasters, fire, contaminated drinking water, illness and disease, transportation related injuries, and hazardous material transport. The majority of these categories fall under the supervision of the Rockford Police and Fire Departments, and the Winnebago County Health Department.

Having adequate community infrastructure and public services provides a foundation for growth and are essential for community health, safety, and quality of life. The challenge comes in planning for all these inter-related services at once based on the current demand while also planning for the expected or future demand based on the growth and development patterns that are expected.

### Public Water Supply & Distribution

#### Water Supply Overview

The City of Rockford's Public Works Department Water Division is responsible for the largest municipally-owned ground water system in Illinois.<sup>i</sup> The city's water supply

comes from groundwater, specifically aquifers, accessed via 25 wells, evenly-spaced throughout the city at 24 locations, and including 28 reservoirs and two elevated water tanks. Public water supplies in the city, as well as the greater Rock River Valley, relies on sand and gravel aquifers, which are shallow and productive but susceptible to contamination easily from surface intrusions.<sup>ii</sup>

Rockford's drinking water is treated directly at the wells, then distributed, via booster pumps, to water mains delivering water to customers in the service area. In 2012, the City of Rockford completed a \$75 million dollar project named Rockford Water System Improvement Project (RWSIP) to improve many pumping stations with filtration and abandon old unused facilities. Since 2012, the Water Division has continued investing an additional \$16 million for the replacement and improvement of additional antiquated water treatment facilities with new modern removal treatment facilities. These improvements have resulted in fewer water quality complaints, reduction in iron levels, enhanced system reliability, and improved water pressure. These continued investments have maintained the water supply's compliance with drinking water standards and regulations.<sup>iii</sup>

#### Water Distribution Infrastructure

The City of Rockford has approximately 824 miles of water main in the city. The city owns and maintains approximately 98% of that water main, with the remaining being privately owned and maintained. The Water Division has an extensive water main replacement capital program for high risk water main. The most up to date meter, billing rates, and fee schedule can be found on the city website.

Monthly Consumption Charge		
Volume (cubic ft)	Non-residential	Residential
First 300 cubic feet	\$2.43	\$2.04
Next 3,700	\$3.66	\$3.26
Next 96,000	\$2.96	\$2.61
Above 100,000	\$1.77	\$1.56

Source: City of Rockford - Water Department

### Long-Term Water Capacity

Rockford's system annually produces 6 billion gallons of water, or approximately 16.5 million gallons daily on average. The system currently has the capacity to produce 44 million gallons per day, or approximately 14.6 billion gallons annually. However, the average daily amount consumed is 16.5 million gallons, which is well below capable capacities.

An analysis of the water levels at city wells revealed that zero are increasing, 22 are stable, three are decreasing, and three exhibit no discernible trend.<sup>iv</sup> This stability in the system reflects a declining pumping volume since records began in 1979, when 32 million gallons per day (MGD) were pumped, compared to only 16 MGD in 2019.<sup>v</sup> This decline is mostly a result of less industrial and manufacturing companies in operation, as well as the increased use of water-saving fixtures and appliances, such as high-efficiency faucets and washing machines in homes.

This overall reduction in groundwater use not only results in cost-savings for the city and consumers but also benefits the fragile aquatic ecosystem of the region. As Rockford looks at leveraging its stable freshwater levels to support aquatic wildlife and natural greenspaces, it is imperative to maintain current trends in water conservation.

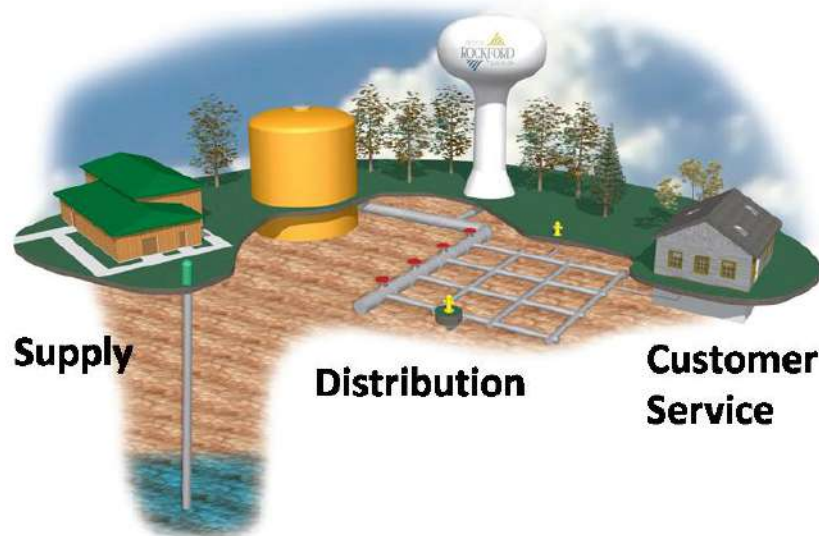
Meter Cost by Size for Residential and Non-Residential		
Size (in)	Non-residential	Residential
5/8 inch	\$16.87	\$16.87
3/4 inch	\$22.17	\$22.17
1 inch	\$32.76	\$32.76
1 1/2 inch	\$59.81	\$59.81
2 inch	\$61.53	\$91.53
3 inch	\$165.60	\$165.60
4 inch	\$271.37	\$271.37
6 inch	\$535.85	\$535.85
8 inch	\$946.35	\$946.35
10 inch	\$1,606.43	-
12 inch	\$2140.61	-

Source: City of Rockford - Water Department

Maximum Capacity vs Current Levels	
	Million Gallons per day
Capacity	55
Average Daily Use	16.5
Available Capacity	44
Peak usage	20

Source: City of Rockford - Water Department

Although the City of Rockford has a relatively vast quantity of groundwater resources, the area does have a history of groundwater contamination. Under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), the Southeast Rockford Groundwater Contamination (SRGWC) was labeled on March 31st, 1989 as a Superfund site.<sup>vi</sup> Since that time, the city has been monitoring various wells to track pollutants that may affect drinking water quality and human health.





Solid Waste Management & Recycling

Solid waste and recycling are managed by the City of Rockford’s Community and Economic Development Department. Residential garbage collection, including hazardous waste, recycling products and yard waste, is contracted out to Rock River Disposal Services. In addition to Rock River Disposal, other waste management companies available are Advanced Waste Services, Advanced Disposal, Rock River Environmental Services, and Veolia Environmental Services located in Davis Junction, to name some.

Most of the solid waste collected in the city is taken to the Winnebago County Landfill, which is located just south of the city near Killbuck Creek, and is a part of Rock River Environmental Solutions. In addition to solid waste, the landfill also performs recycling and composting services.<sup>vii</sup> High hazard chemicals from environmental projects, industrial cleaning, and emergency responses can be disposed of at Rock River Environmental Solutions.<sup>viii</sup> Additionally, residential household hazardous waste, such as non-alkaline and automotive batteries, oil-based paint, pesticides, fertilizer and passenger tires, can be disposed of at their Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Center. Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful (KNIB) also offers recycling services for various items.

The only construction and demolition debris collection and disposal facility in Winnebago County is Advanced Disposal, located in Rockford’s central city. This facility also provides commercial and residential waste collection, as well as commercial recycling and disposal. Residents curious as to how items can be disposed of, when their collection days are or want to report waste related problems, can now turn to the online Waste Wizard Tool on the city’s website.<sup>ix</sup>

Waste Performance Measures

The city uses several sanitation performance measures to determine its budget each year for solid waste collection and disposal. These performance measures allow the city to review the actual versus budgeted tonnage and forecast future costs. These measures are reported in the city’s annual budget and include tonnage by waste, compost, recycling, landfill and diversion, as well as diversion rates.

Between 2011 and 2019, the city had its lowest tonnage of waste produced in 2012, with 45,497 tons. Since 2012, waste tonnage has steadily grown over time and peaked in 2016 at 51,141 tons. Since 2016, it has remained around 50,000 tons annually. Another measure of solid waste

management is compost tonnage. Composting is the biological decomposition or decay of organic wastes. Compost tonnage was at its highest in 2011, with 14,812 tons. However, compost tonnage has remained stable with an average of 12,500 tons annually. Recycling tonnage peaked in 2015 (8,230 tons) and remained fairly stable between 2011 and 2019. The final waste performance measure reported by the city relates to the diversion of recyclable materials from disposal to resource recovery. Diversion rates for Rockford have decreased since 2011, with the lowest rate of 26.7 percent occurring in 2017.

Tonnage by Type of Waste (2011 – 2019)						
Year	Waste Tonnage	Compost Tonnage	Recycling Tonnage	Landfill Tonnage	Diverted Tonnage	Diversion Rate (%)
2011	48,038	14,812	6,886	48,038	21,698	31%
2012	45,497	12,440	6,064	45,497	18,504	29%
2013	45,970	13,114	6,499	45,970	19,613	30%
2014	47,314	11,994	7,250	47,314	19,244	29%
2015	47,140	12,470	8,230	47,140	20,700	31%
2016	48,608	12,777	7,675	48,608	20,452	30%
2017	51,141	11,626	6,969	51,141	18,595	27%
2018	49,985	12,720	7,639	49,985	20,359	29%
2019	50,691	12,714	7,606	50,691	20,320	29%

Source: City of Rockford - Water Department

Recycling and Diversion Opportunities

Rockford’s largest recycling initiatives and programs are led by Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful (KNIB), a regional chapter of the Keep America Beautiful (KAB). KNIB is a non-profit organization with a mission to improve the environment through education, public awareness, and community involvement. One of the unique services KNIB provides is its medication drives. These events allow individuals to safely dispose of unused or expired prescription medicine and other pharmaceutical drugs. Prescriptions can also be dropped off at a 24-hour secure drop boxes located in the lobby of each Rockford Police Department District station and City Hall. Residents may drop off up to one, 1-gallon bag per visit, once a week.

City Hall also hosts an Eagle Scouts of America sponsored drop-off box for faded, torn, and worn out flags that need to be retired in accordance with the United States Flag Code.

Reviewing current waste disposal policies may introduce new opportunities to address community concerns and explore waste-to-energy initiatives. The benefits of a robust policy regarding sanitation, waste disposal, and re-

cycling are numerous and include waste reduction, lower reliance on landfills and other more disruptive disposal methods, and mitigating environmental impacts of dealing with human generated waste. Having a strong sanitation policy can ensure a clean water supply and reduce exposures to contaminants, both of which can become larger public health issues.

## Electricity & Natural Gas Supply/Demand

A stable supply of power is crucial to community health, well-being and safety, both for residents and businesses. Strong economic activity relies on stable, low cost sources of energy and Rockford benefits from the robust energy market of Northern Illinois. Competition in the Midwest has resulted in higher reliability while still maintaining lower costs. In fact, Illinois had the smallest increase in average electric prices in the U.S. between 1997 and 2016 at a 19 percent increase.<sup>x</sup> When compared to states with a similar climate, Illinois households spend two percent more for energy than the U.S. average.<sup>xi</sup> While Illinois households may pay slightly more for energy, they benefit from the stability in pricing and availability, making Rockford a desirable location for both residents and business.

Home and business heating makes up a greater portion of Illinois' overall energy use when compared to the national average, most likely a result of colder than average winters.<sup>xii</sup> In fact, over 80 percent of Illinois households use natural gas as their main space heating fuel.<sup>xiii</sup> According to the US Census's American Community Survey (ACS), 82.9 percent of housing units in Rockford were heated by utility gas in 2019, compared to 96 percent in 2010. More housing units in Rockford are now heated by electricity, which jumped from only 3.1 percent to 15.3 percent of housing units between 2010 and 2019.

Rockford's electricity and natural gas are supplied by Commonwealth Edison Company (ComEd) and Northern Illinois Gas Company (Nicor Gas), respectively.

**Commonwealth Edison (ComEd):** ComEd was formed in September 1907 as a product of Thomas Edison's earlier Western Edison Light Company and is now part of the Exelon Corporation. The company serves four million customers in Northern Illinois. ComEd does not own power plants to produce electricity itself; instead, they serve as a facilitator between producers and consumers.<sup>xiv</sup>

**Northern Illinois Gas Company (Nicor Gas):** Nicor Gas operates and maintains natural gas pipes and distributes natural gas to certified marketers. They have been serving

Northern Illinois for six decades and currently have 2.2 million customers in more than 650 communities. With a 34,000-mile distribution system in eight interstate pipelines, Nicor Gas typically purchases gas during summer months, when it is less expensive, as a way to balance the cost and supply in the winter.<sup>xv</sup>

## Electricity

The sources of electricity in Illinois are becoming less carbon-intensive, but a considerable portion of electrical generation still originates from fossil fuels.<sup>xvi</sup> Looking at Northern Illinois in particular, 39 percent sourced by ComEd was fire-powered natural gas, followed by 35 percent of electricity sourced from nuclear power in 2020. Other sources of electricity were coal-fired (21 percent), wind power (3 percent), hydro power (1 percent), or some other source (1 percent). Coal generation accounted for 32 percent of electricity sourced in 2018, has decreased in recent years, while nuclear has increased. In 2020, Illinois generated most of its electricity from nuclear energy, with the states six nuclear plants accounting for 12 percent of total nuclear net generation in the nation.<sup>xvii</sup> However, given nuclear facility ages and public perception, the energy provided by these facilities may change in the future.

Due to the high percentage of electricity sourced from nuclear power, Northern Illinois had a stake in the most recent Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). With 75 percent of the Byron nuclear plant's employees living in Lee, Ogle, or Winnebago Counties and every 100 jobs at the plant supporting an estimated 221 jobs in other industries, the planned plant shutdown put into jeopardy 2,305 jobs in the region.<sup>xviii</sup> The recently signed CEJA promises \$700 million in support for the cost-intensive nuclear energy sector.<sup>xix</sup> Wind and solar are also expected to be scaled up according to the legislation. Currently, wind energy accounts for only a small portion of the overall power generation in Illinois, but the state's environment could be excellent for further turbine development.<sup>xx</sup>

Electricity costs between January and March 2021 were 7.069 cents per Kilowatt-hour (kWh), with the transmission services charge accounting for 1.216 cents per kWh.<sup>xxi</sup>

## Solar Electric Production

The City of Rockford's allowance of solar panel installation in all major zones is codified in the city's zoning ordinance. Solar is permitted in every zone with a performance review that is conducted at the administrative level with planning and development staff. This performance review does not include a subjective design review process or design review committee. To review the full planning

ordinance pertaining to solar use in Rockford please, refer to the City of Rockford Zoning Ordinance last amended in 2021 to cover new trends in solar.<sup>xxii</sup>

**Rockford currently has a few larger scale solar farms in the region.**

Horsman Quarry site, a previously polluted brownfield property owned by Trajectory Partners was developed in conjunction with the City of Rockford and other local stakeholders. The project was selected in the first round of the Illinois Solar for All program. Nexamp is the long-term owner and operator of this system, which was completed in November 2021. This project is bringing utility bill savings to over 500 low-income families in the Rockford Area and economic development to the environmental justice community the project is located in. Local low-income residents are able to subscribe to this project through the Give-A-Ray program.



A Solar Farm just south of the Chicago Rockford International Airport in Rockford, Illinois, is one of the largest commercial airport solar farms in the United States and a landmark achievement in complex intergovernmental cooperation in solar power plant development. This 62 Megawatt Solar Project currently generates 3,900 MWh/year. The project's 3.06 MW Phase I is complete and fully operational in 2012 with 56 additional acres fully approved by Rockford, Winnebago County, State of Illinois, and the FAA for immediate development of the 14 MW Phase II and scaling the Project to 62 MW moving forward.

### Natural Gas

As noted above, the majority of homes within Rockford are heated through natural gas. Even a large portion of the electricity is produced by natural gas. Since 2018, natural gas has been increasing in its proportion of the total electricity produced increasing by 28.0 percent, but there could be a change in this as the cost per therm continues

to sharply increase.

Between April 2020 and April 2021, natural gas cost per therm doubled from \$0.26 to \$0.53, partially due to COVID-19. For residential users, Nicor charges a monthly rate of \$17.96, \$0.0838 per therm, and a Rider 6 gas supply cost.<sup>xxiii</sup>

### Utility Cost-Saving Programs

#### ComEd Programs

ComEd provides a variety of residential cost-saving programs to assist customers in heating and lighting their homes. One of their largest programs is their free energy assessments for single-family and multi-family properties and provides customers free or discounted products. ComEd also provides consumers with a number of rebates and discounts on Energy Star appliances, LED light bulbs, smart thermostats, heating and cooling, and pool pumps. ComEd supports multi-family housing by providing affordable housing developers access to the ComEd Multi-Family Standard, which is an integrated bundle of 13 energy-efficiency measures for building envelope, lighting, HVAC, hot water, and appliances.

In addition to residential assistance, ComEd also supports local businesses through their free Facility Assessment Program, which assists companies in identifying energy-saving opportunities in buildings and facilities, such as lighting, instant discounts, small business and facilities, HVAC, small biz kits- free and self-installing, refrigeration, lab equipment, variable speed drives (VSDS), commercial kitchen equipment, and high-performance building design for new construction. They also offer on-line energy management tools to analyze company energy usage and find programs that pay for utilizing less energy. Energy-reducing ideas, for buildings and facilities, are targeted specific to industry and sector.

#### Nicor Gas Programs

Current Nicor Gas initiatives support promising technologies that have the potential to generate natural gas savings for their customers. Similar to ComEd, Nicor Gas provides residential customers an energy assessment to receive a report on energy cost saving. As part of the assessment, customers also receive a free water-saving or weatherization kit.<sup>xxiv</sup> Additionally, some of the efficiency improvements identified in the assessment may qualify for rebates or an Energy Efficiency Loan if the work is performed by licensed contractors contactable through the website.



Another program is Nicor Gas's Sharing Program. This program is a one-time grant of \$350 or \$400 to assist consumers with their unpaid bills. To qualify residential customers must be above the federal poverty level (up to 300 percent) and the bill is in their name. The amount available is determined by a sliding scale. Similarly, Nicor Gas Energy Aide Program provides qualifying households with monetary relief for their natural gas bills.

Nicor Gas commercial customers can take advantage of a commercial energy assessment where a skilled energy advisor or certified engineer will conduct a free assessment of their building needs and to also identify energy efficiency opportunities. A report is generated following the assessment that highlights potential efficiency improvements. As with residential improvements, certain efficiency improvements may qualify for rebate if the work is performed by licensed contractors contactable through the website. Custom incentives are also available to commercial customers who install qualifying energy efficiency projects that are not eligible for rebates through other Nicor Gas offerings. There's also an opportunity for owners and property managers of multi-family rental properties with five units or more only. A multi-family energy assessment is conducted by an energy advisor who will collect information about their property's energy use. A report will be provided that details the energy needs, and opportunities for saving energy and money at each property.<sup>xxv</sup>

#### Other Programs for Residential Customers

Other energy assistance programs available to Rockford residents include:

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) - This program is available to all households up to 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline, with income on a sliding-scale based upon family size.

Percent of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) - PIPP allows eligible customers to pay a flat percentage of their income towards maintaining their utility service. Eligibility based upon an active residential customer utilizing natural gas heat having been LIHEAP approved and below 150 percent federal poverty level.

Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program (IHWAP) - IHWAP offers weatherization (efficiency) improvements to low-income households based upon the combined household income not exceeding 150 percent of the federal poverty level for state and federal funding, or 200 percent federal poverty level for DOE

funding. Nicor offers similar services to customers with incomes up to 80 percent of the Area Median Income.

## **Telecommunications Infrastructure**

Telecommunications is a major industry shaping the economy, businesses, and daily lives of Rockford's residents. According to the Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook, telecommunications refers to "any origination, creation, transmission, emission, storage-retrieval, or reception of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, or intelligence of any nature, by wire, radio, television, optical, or other means." Unlike other utilities, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 allows any company or non-profit to enter the communications market. Additionally, the city cannot prohibit telecommunications services specifically, but can monitor and manage telecommunications facilities, towers, and usage of the public right-of-way. Current zoning ordinances addresses site location, co-location, design, height, setback, abandonment, variances, and approval standards.<sup>xxvi</sup>

All citizens, businesses, and organizations in Rockford should have access to the latest telecommunications services available on the market, as it provides its citizens with information in an affordable and timely manner, bridges educational and access gaps, cultivates communication, and fosters economic development.

### **Fiber Optic Lines**

Fiber optic cable lines transmit data at very high speeds and are located in city right-of-way, both above and below grade. Because fiber optic lines use public rights-of-way, the city must insure that they are used efficiently. Rockford currently has a permitting process for telecommunications and a franchising fee for SBC (Ameritech).

In March 2021, Rockford City Council signed a development agreement with SiFi Networks for utilization of public way for the establishment of a citywide fiber optic network system.<sup>xxvii</sup> The agreement is a private investment, in excess of \$200 million dollars, and includes additional opportunities to further Smart City Initiatives partnerships. Construction would likely take two to three years to fully install the citywide network. This improvement is expected to reduce internet and TV access costs for residents, could attract new providers, as well as attract economic development opportunities.

## Telecommunications Facilities

The need for and importance of towers will only continue to increase as time goes on. Currently, the major use of towers is to provide cellular phone service. Rockford is covered by a number of cellular phone towers from multiple companies.

The COVID-19 pandemic made telecommunication and the ability to work remotely an essential and necessary need for nearly every household. The pandemic highlighted the socioeconomic disparity between households with access to Wi-Fi compared to those without. As a result, cities have begun providing free Wi-Fi service in selected areas, such as in the city centers and low-income, high-minority neighborhoods. However, the growth in the Wi-Fi network will require additional towers in the area to facilitate new demands in service. The zoning ordinance cur-

rently only addresses antenna support structure and may need to be updated to accommodate the growing need for new antennas. The most important issues to address are permitted locations of antennas, safety, and cohesiveness.

## Public Safety & Emergency Responders

Protecting the public from crimes, natural disasters, and other threats are some of the most important services a city can provide to its citizens. However, preparing for and responding to these events can be a challenge for any city, especially in a city the size of Rockford, as it requires high levels of staff, resources, and money. Public safety for Rockford is primarily provided by the Rockford Police Department and the Rockford Fire Department. Both of these departments are under the responsibility of the three-member Board of Fire and Police Commissioners.

Understanding the historic and current public safety trends will help the city make decisions necessary to ensure a higher level of safety is provided in the future.

First, looking at crime rates between 2009 and 2019 the Rockford Police Department reported a significant improvement in the reduction of crimes. During this time period, there was a 38.1 percent decrease in the total number of crimes in the city, with an 18.7 percent decrease in violent crimes and a 41.9 percent decrease in property crimes.

Of the total number of crimes in the city, violent crimes made up 21.8 percent in 2019. Of the four categories of violent crimes, aggravated assaults were the most reported (70.2 percent), followed by robberies (20.1 percent), rape (8.8 percent), and homicide (0.9 percent). Both robberies and homicides saw the largest decreases between 2009 and 2019, with decreases of 52.7 percent and 35 percent, respectively. However, most recent reports from the Rockford Police Department have shown an increase of 20.6 percent of violent crimes<sup>xxviii</sup> between 2019 and 2020 (period of January to November). Both reports of shots fired and aggravated assault also saw double digit percent increases (49.4 percent and 33.2 percent, respectively). The recent increases in violent crimes is important to Rockford's public safety and needs to be recognized.

Property crimes accounted for 78.2 percent of all crimes reported in 2019, a 41.9 percent decrease from 2009. Larceny thefts (70.7 percent) and burglaries (19.8 percent) accounted for the largest number of property crimes, and also has had the largest percent decreases between 2009 and 2019 (39.2 percent and 56.7 percent, respectively).



5G Cell Tower Installation

During this period, arson was the only crime with an increase of 79.5 percent in the number reported. However, the number of arsons had decreased since 2013, when the number peaked at 107 incidents.<sup>xxix</sup> Looking at the most recent statistics, between 2020 and 2021, auto thefts and aggravated assaults saw significant increases in the number reported (80.3 percent and 21.7 percent, respectively). However, overall the total number of property crimes in 2020 (3,874) is significantly lower than the annual average (6,764.6) between 2009 and 2019.<sup>xxx</sup> Reports of robbery, auto theft, and other property crimes have also decreased between 2019 and 2020 (5.5 percent, 4.9 percent, and 17 percent, respectively).

In addition to crime, it is also important to look at the number and nature of calls for service received by the Rockford Fire Department. In 2018, the Rockford Fire Department received a total of 29,217 calls, an increase of 7.5 percent since 2016. The majority of calls received were for EMS Search and Rescue at 78.4 percent of all calls, followed by Service/Good Intent calls (11.4 percent), false alarms (5.7 percent), and fire (2.5 percent). Since 2016, the false alarms and good intent calls have had the largest increases with 11.3 percent and 18.5 percent, respectively.

Looking at structure fires, total value of buildings involved in a fire was \$29,719,819, of which only \$3,026,920 was lost. This means that the Rockford Fire Department (RFD) was able to save 89.8 percent of the value of the buildings from fires. Unfortunately, there have been casualties and injuries as a result of structural fires and the RFD always strives to reduce this number to zero.

Crime Statistics (2009-2020)											
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Homicide	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Rape	8%	8%	8%	9%	9%	9%	9%	8%	7%	8%	9%
Robbery	35%	27%	32%	29%	24%	27%	28%	29%	25%	21%	20%
Aggravated Assaults	57%	65%	59%	61%	66%	64%	62%	62%	67%	69%	70%
Violent Crimes	1,739	1,873	1,779	1,716	1,633	1,563	1,814	1,873	1,727	1,659	1,413
Arson	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Burglary	27%	29%	25%	28%	26%	25%	23%	24%	25%	21%	20%
Larceny Theft	68%	64%	67%	66%	67%	68%	67%	66%	65%	70%	71%
Motor Vehicle Theft	5%	6%	7%	5%	5%	6%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Property Crimes	8,753	8,083	7,424	7,945	7,243	6,668	6,142	5,853	5,510	5,708	5,082
All Crimes	10,492	9,956	9,203	9,661	8,876	8,231	7,956	7,726	7,237	7,367	6,495

Source: FBI Crime Index Database

## Rockford Police Department

The role of the Rockford Police Department is protecting and serving the residents and visitors of the city. Under the direction of Police Chief Carla Redd, the city's first female police chief, the Rockford police force consists of 345 employees, consisting of 302 sworn officers, including a deputy chief, five assistant deputy chiefs, ten lieutenants, 32 sergeants, 74 investigators, and 178 patrol officers in 2021.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Some of their efforts to increase public safety include:

**Citizen Police Academy:** The mission of the Citizen Police Academy is to build cooperative relationships between citizens and the police through training and education. The police academy produces a network of informed citizens who can return to their neighborhoods to organize, encourage and mobilize others, and to partner with police in reducing crime in Rockford.

**Community Services Unit:** The Community Services Unit consists of Rockford police officers who are responsible for developing crime reducing and problem-solving partnerships with the citizens and businesses in their areas. Officers within this unit employ both traditional and non-traditional methods to solve these problems.<sup>xxxii</sup>



Rock House: In 2017, the Rockford Police Department launched its first two Resident Officer Community Keeper Houses. The houses are a part of the department's community policing initiatives aimed to cultivate and strengthen relationships within the community by having officers reside in the neighborhoods they are sworn to protect and serve. Officers work daily, managing their schedule, based on the needs of the neighborhoods.

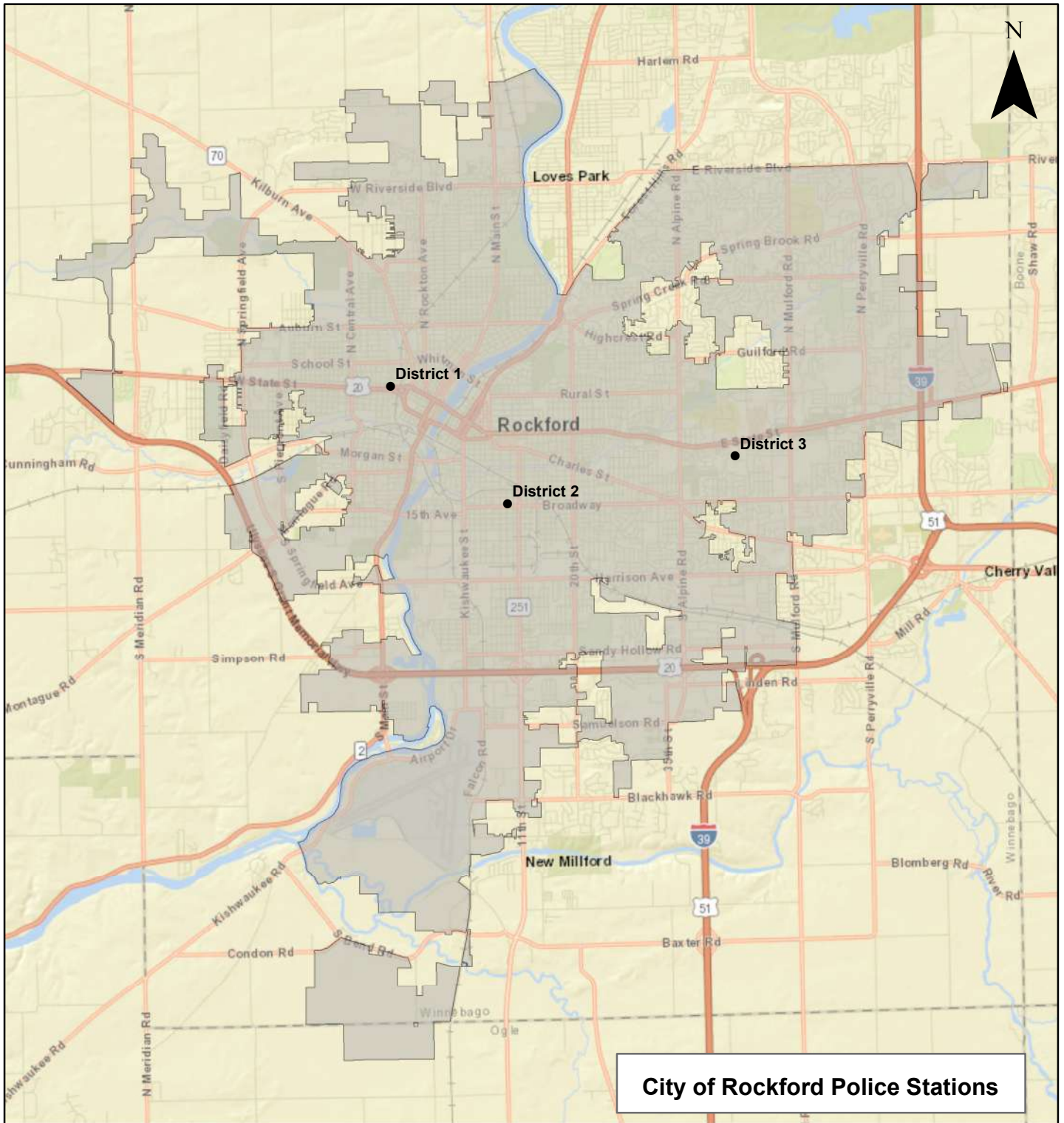
In 2012, the police department announced its plans to move operations from one central location to a geo-policing method, which divides the policing tasks among three districts within the city in order to cut down on response times and increase public safety. Each of the city's three districts has its own commanding officer and focuses on the specific needs of their respective zones. Rockford's District 1 Police Station, located at 1045 West State Street, was opened in 2017 and is the sole department on the west side of the Rock River. The District 2 Police Station is located at 1410 Broadway, and District 3 Police Station, which is also the department headquarters, is located at 557 South New Towne Drive.

Calls for Service (2016-2018)						
	2016		2017		2018	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Fire	679	2%	752	3%	716	2%
EMS Search & Rescue	21,580	79%	22,390	79%	22,892	78%
Hazardous Condition	550	2%	574	2%	550	2%
Service/Good Intent Call	2,805	10%	3,054	11%	3,323	11%
False Alarm/Call	1,505	6%	1,544	5%	1,675	6%
Other	70	0%	64	0%	61	0%
Total	27,189		28,378		29,217	

Source: Rockford Fire Department 2016, 2017, & 2018



Rockford Police Department - District 1 - West State Street





## Rockford Fire Department

Under the direction of Fire Chief Michele Pankow, the city's first female fire chief, the Rockford Fire Department is the second largest fire department in the state of Illinois. There are over 300 employees of the fire department represented by uniformed firefighters, civilians, and 911 center personnel. Annually, the Rockford Fire Department responds to over 28,000 emergency incidents and provides firefighting, emergency medical, hazardous material mitigation, extrication, water rescue, educational opportunities, training, and other technical rescue services.

The city is protected by nine engines, four ladder trucks, and seven advanced life support ambulances housed at 11 fire stations strategically located throughout Rockford. The City of Rockford's water supply system plays a key role in the Rockford Fire Department efforts. The Fire Department is one of the few in Illinois to have received a "2" ranking from the Insurance Services Office (ISO), of which water supply accounts for 40 percent of the final determination. The fire department maintains the ISO Class 2 rating and has been accredited through the Center for Public Safety Excellence since 2011 and the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services since 2015.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The fire department also provides several classroom and youth education programs, home and commercial preemptive strategies, and a dive/drowning prevention team.

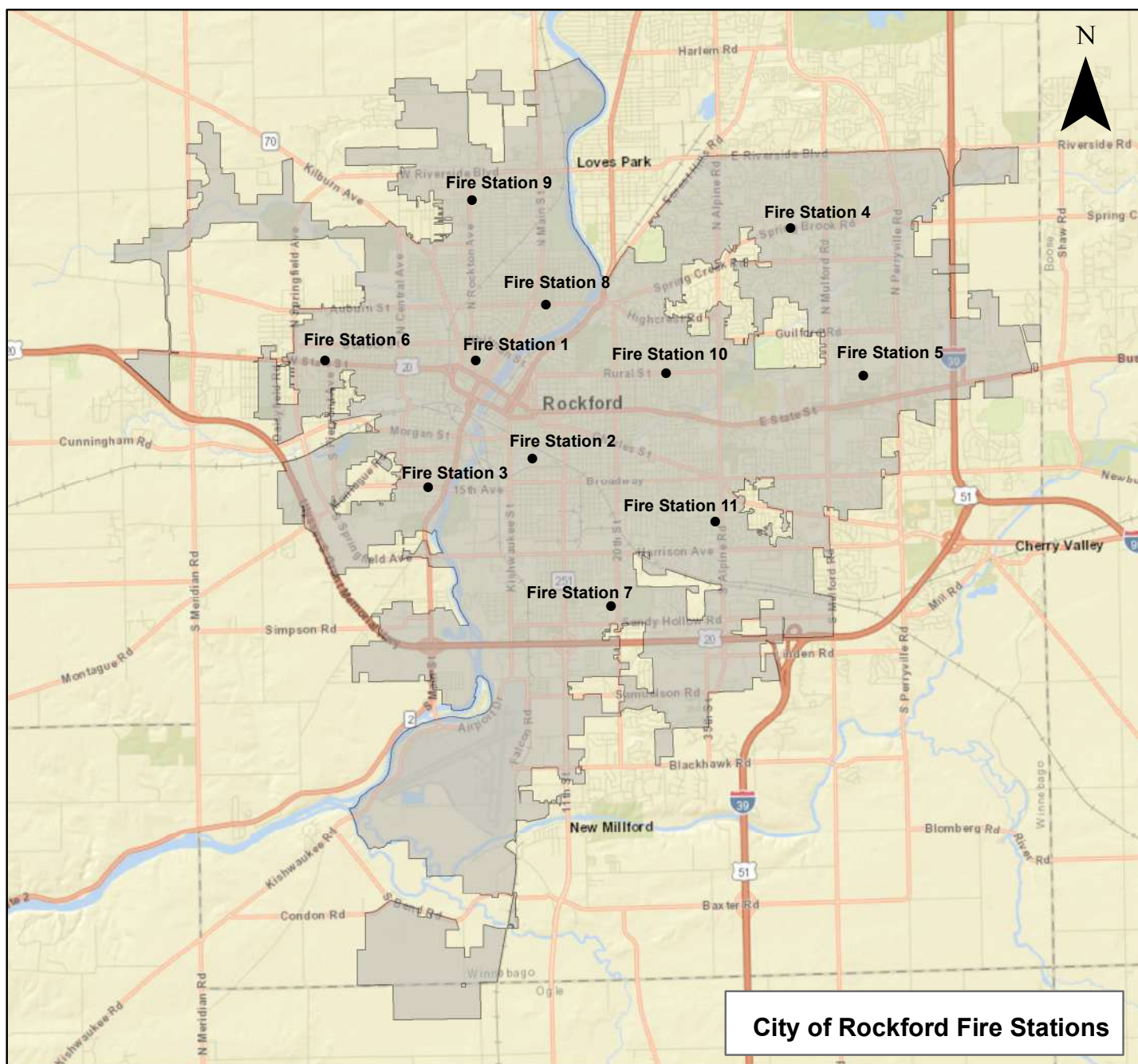
Dive Team/Drowning Prevention - The fire department's 22-member water rescue team responds to all bodies of water within the city limits as well as a 50-mile radius as part of the Winnebago County Water Rescue and Recovery Team.

School and Youth Programs - The Rockford Fire Department has active fire prevention programs for Rockford public and private school children, including age-appropriate presentations in English and Spanish; the Survive Alive House, a Home Escape Demonstration Simulator; the Juvenile Fire Setters Program, for local youth that have started fires in the past to show them the dangers of playing with fire; and Rockford Fire Explorers Post 413, for high school students interested in fire and EMS service to see first-hand the day-to-day operations of this profession.

Home and Commercial Preemptive Strategies - Each year, the Rockford Fire Department conducts home safety surveys throughout the city, where firefighters check smoke detectors and identify any fire hazards that may exist, as well as the Annual Commercial Pre-Plan Program, in which each individual fire company performs (30) detailed pre-plans of target hazard buildings in their typical response territory.







### Public Safety Facilities

While police and fire stations may not seem it, they are strategically placed in locations based on the type, frequency, and nature of the calls that each region of our city experiences. Often times, a great deal of thought is put into this process.

The placement of the police and fire department facilities has a direct impact on the areas they service and the residents within them. Because of the different ways in which police and fire services are handled, one constantly patrolling while the other responding to calls from fixed locations, their facilities are built and designed differently.

Because of the need to have fire protection and emergency response facilities within certain distances of populated areas, the demand for new fire stations will exceed those for police stations. Future fire stations may be needed if Rockford continues to grow. Specifically, a new station would be needed to the northwest if development continues north of Elmwood Road, west of the current city limits. An additional southwest station may be needed in the future, as the regions around US 20 Bypass continue to grow in density.

Public Health

Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of individuals and their communities.<sup>xxxiv</sup> By addressing public health issues, communities can improve quality of life, support community wellness, and see cost savings through preventative programing. Public health is a broad, evolving field and each community has unique public health issues to address. Some common public health concerns across all communities are chronic disease, healthcare access and equality, substance abuse, and long-term access to food and shelter. Public health policy and programming can help prevent the spread of diseases, save and extend lives, and empower community members to lead healthy lifestyles through public education, preventative care programs, and initiatives aimed at improving people’s health no matter their age.

The City of Rockford works with the Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD) to address the array of unique community and public health issues through local initiatives and programs. Some of the burdens or challenges with public health policy include, but are not limited to, data collection and monitoring (especially for vulnerable groups), funding, public health issues with multiple causes, differing crises strategies, and new information needed to make informed decisions.

Winnebago County Health Metrics

As noted, public health varies from community to community. Communities are able to be compared through several health metrics tracked to monitor public health and to aid in identifying areas of particular concern. Health metrics are often reported at the county-level and cover a broad range of topics. Some of the key health metrics for Winnebago County are detailed below.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Mortality

- Generally, infant mortality has remained relatively stable since 2018 at 7 deaths per 1,000. While White and Hispanic infant mortality rates have remained relatively the same between 2018 and 2021, Black infant mortality has gone from 12 to 15 deaths per 1,000 during the same period.
- Child mortality has increased by 40 percent since 2016. Child mortality peaked in 2017 at 70 deaths per 100,000 children and has remained at this rate as of 2021. Looking at child mortality rates by race, the mortality rate of Hispanic children has increased since 2018 and has stayed at the same peak level since 2019.
- Premature age-adjusted mortality per 100,000 increased

by 7 percent from 2016 to 2021. Premature deaths peaked in 2020, with 420 deaths per 100,000 residents. In 2021, Blacks had the highest average age-adjusted death rate at 623 deaths per 100,000, while Hispanics had the lowest age-adjusted death rate at 237 deaths per 100,000.

Mortality Rates by Race (2020)				
	Black	Hispanic	White	Asian
Infant Mortality Rate (Per 1,000)	15	5	5	-
Child Mortality Rate (Per 100,000)	130	50	70	-
Premature Age-Adjusted Rate (per 100,000)	640	260	420	170
Life Expectancy (Years)	72	84	77	87

Source: Winnebago County Health Ranking Database

- The number of drug overdose deaths in the county increased between 2016 and 2021, from 29 percent in 2016 to 45 percent in 2021. In 2020, Winnebago County had one of the highest number of drug overdose deaths for a county its size, with 147 deaths as a result of an overdose, up from 123 deaths in 2019.<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- As of 2021, the average life expectancy in Winnebago County is 76.8 years. Asians had the highest average life expectancy (85.8 years), followed by Hispanics (83.5 years), Whites (76.9), and Blacks (71.6 years).

Other Health Outcomes or Behaviors

Overall, health behavior metrics of adult obesity, physical inactivity, access to exercise opportunities, food insecurity, and food environment have all improved between 2016 and 2021.

- In 2021, 30 percent of adult residents in Winnebago County were considered obese and 91 percent of adults had access to exercise activities, whether utilized or not.
- The percent of adults who smoke was 21 percent in 2021, an increase from 2016 when only 17 percent reported to smoke.
- Excessive drinking among residents has remained the same from 2016 - 2021, around 19 percent annually.
- Diabetes prevalence has remained relatively stable since 2016, around 11 percent.

- HIV prevalence per 100,000 has had a decrease of 3.7 percent between 2016 and 2019, however has fluctuated between 155 per 100,000 and 165 per 100,000 during that time frame.
- Teen births per 1,000 female county residents ages 15 through 19 has fallen across the majority of racial groups between 2016 to 2021, from 130 teen births per 1,000 births to 120 teen births per 1,000 births.

### Clinical Care in Winnebago County

- The rate of residents under age 65 without health insurance in Winnebago County has nearly halved between 2016 (13 percent) and 2021 (8 percent). The number of uninsured adults ages 18 to 65 has decreased between 2016 (17 percent) and 2021 (10 percent), reaching its lowest point ever in 2019 (8 percent). The rate of uninsured children fell by 25 percent between 2016 (4 percent) and 2021 (3 percent).
- In 2021, 51 percent of individuals received flu vaccinations. Flu vaccination rates were highest for Whites at 52 percent, followed closely for Asians (51 percent), Hispanics (42 percent), and Blacks (35 percent). Rates across all racial and ethnic groups have stayed relatively stable in recent years.

### Public Health Care Providers

Rockford residents enjoy easy access to globally competitive health care, as the city is fortunate to have several major healthcare systems including UW Health (formerly SwedishAmerican), MercyHealth, Crusader Community Health, and OSF Medical Group, in addition to a number of other smaller providers. The patient to health care provider, by type, for Winnebago County is provided in the table below.

Patient to Provider Ratio						
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Patients to Primary Care Physicians Ratio	1,330:1	1,340:1	1300:1	1280:1	1410:1	1340:1
Patients to Dentists Ratio	1,440:1	1,390:1	1310:1	1270:1	1300:1	1190:1
Patients to Mental Health Providers Ratio	790:1	730:1	690:1	660:1	520:1	490:1

Source: Winnebago County Health Ranking Database

In addition to healthcare providers, residents can seek assistance from the Winnebago County Health Department.

### Winnebago County Health Department

The Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD) provides services designed to protect, promote, and maintain the health of Winnebago County residents. Services address three primary goals: improving the length of useful life, reducing health disparities, and assuring access to preventive health services for every person in Winnebago County. WCHD has a variety of programs and centers designed to address and prevent public health issues in the county.

An overview of the major providers are listed below:

- Center for Environmental Health Improvement: The Center for Environmental Health Improvement promotes health for all through a healthy environment. The center provides education and inspection services related to public facilities.
- Center for Health Protection and Promotion: The Center for Health Protection and Promotion coordinates services that address preventive interventions related to the early identification of the disease process, education, and linkage with services either by community providers or directly offered clinical services. This includes disease control for reportable diseases like TB, HIV and sexually-transmitted infections, and outbreak investigation capacity.
- Family Health Services Center: The Family Health Services Center focuses on improving the well-being of mothers, infants, and children by providing a range of integrated services that offer educational and nutritional support for pregnant women, infants and children (with high-risk medical conditions). Other services include women, infant and children food assistant program (WIC), family case management, high-risk infant nursing, HealthWorks (Case Management for wards of the state), well-child exams/immunizations, lead screening, and daycare/nurse consultations.
- The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC): MRC is a national network of more than 200,000 volunteers organized locally to improve the health and safety of their communities. They provide close collaboration with both the city and county emergency disaster services and are essential to prevent, detect early, prepare, respond, and recover from major health incidences.<sup>xxxvii</sup>



### **UWHealth**

UWHealth (formerly SwedishAmerican) is a healthcare provider that has been serving Rockford for more than a century. Recently SwedishAmerican became a division of UW Health, an academic health system associated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison that encompasses research, education, and patient care activities. UWHealth has 17 locations for primary care, three hospitals with two emergency departments and an immediate care facility, and 33 specialty care locations throughout Northern Illinois. UWHealth primary campus is located in downtown Rockford and is home to their Women's and Children Hospital, Breast Health Center, Heart Hospital, Maternal-Fetal Medicine Clinic, Neuro & Headache Center, Palliative Care Clinic, and UW Health Surgery. UWHealth Regional Cancer Center and Creekside Clinic are recent additions that provide healthcare access to the city's far northeast side.

### **Mercyhealth**

Mercyhealth is a regional health system with seven hospitals and eighty-five other primary and specialty care locations throughout Northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. In Rockford, Mercyhealth has two hospitals and eight clinics, offering services for behavioral health, cancer care, diabetes care, dermatology, eye care, heart and vascular care, hospice care, neuroscience, home health, occupational health, pediatric care and specialties, plastic surgery, sports medicine, and women's health. Their Javon Bea Hospital-Rockton, formerly Rockford Memorial Hospital, is located on the city's west side on Rockton Avenue, while their newest hospital, Javon Bea Hospital-Riverside, opened on the city's far northeast side in 2019. However, it was an unfortunate and disappointing decision to close inpatient services at the Rockton Campus in early 2022. The reason for doing so was described as mostly due to an on-site flooding issue that the City of Rockford had no control over due to it being a privately owned property. Additionally, the majority opinion was that the flooding was mostly a result of an abundance of paved and impervious surfaces located at the medical facility. Of recent, a parking lot expansion made the issue worse.

### **OSF Medical Group**

OSF Medical Group runs the OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center, off of East State Street, and two immediate care sites in Rockford. OSF Medical Group provides the following services to the community at their Rockford location: behavioral & mental health, cancer care, emergency care, diabetes care, heart & vascular care, inpatient care, wound care, pediatric care, primary care, testing & diagnostics, women's health, wellness, and plastic surgery.

### **Crusader Community Health**

Crusader Community Health was created in 1972 and currently operates eight community health centers in our region. Their mission is to serve the Rock River Valley area with quality primary health care for all people in need, particularly low-income individuals. They have a total of eight locations in the Rock River Valley, with four locations in Rockford. Their recently built headquarters is located on the city's west side on West State Street. Crusader focuses on integrated care services related to family practice, pediatrics, women's health services with OB (and a midwife program), internal medicine, and dentistry; it also provides specialty services. They serve approximately 58,000 patients annually, of whom 68 percent are on Medicaid, 13 percent are uninsured, 6 percent are on Medicare, and 13 percent have private insurance. Looking at the demographics of their patients, 31 percent are White, 31 percent are Hispanic, 29 percent are African American, and 44 percent are under the age of 19. There are 1,100 average annual births, which represents 25 percent of all Winnebago County births, from this location.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

### **Rockford Regional Health Council**

Assisting these healthcare providers is the Rockford Regional Health Council, which is a nonprofit organization that provides health care support through data gathering and analysis, education, and advocacy. The collaboration of healthcare and community partners enables the non-partisan council to focus on health education and program development, while advocating for change and equality with regard to today's health issues.<sup>xxxix</sup>

### **Covid-19**

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Rockford took several steps to limit the spread of the coronavirus. For the general public, the city required face coverings and limited public gatherings based on the State of Illinois guidelines. In an effort to support businesses, the city developed outdoor dining guidelines and requirements, food sale guidelines, deferred tax collection (food, beverage, and hotel/motel tax), provided business workgroup opportunities, small business loans, and business resources. The Winnebago County Health Department has COVID-19 vaccination sites and testing available via online registration. In addition to these efforts, WCHD also regularly updates related guidelines and available resources as infection rates and mitigation efforts develop along with national standards.





One of Many Community Gardens in Rockford



Commemorative "Topping Off" Beam Signing Ceremony - New Downtown Public Library



# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE, PUBLIC SAFETY, & PUBLIC HEALTH

### Establish a public-private partnership to pilot waste conversion technologies

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Solicit proposals to develop conversion technology facilities to dispose of locally generated waste	\$	Long	Low
Work to attract investments by private companies to implement new technologies that are aimed at the reduction of locally generated waste with the overall goal of becoming a more sustainable city	\$	Long	Low

### Maintain and enhance infrastructure that delivers water to city residents and businesses

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue conducting system performance tests and maintenance as needed	\$	Short	Medium
Continue to budget for repair of water main infrastructure as needed	\$	Short	Medium
Implement city-wide valve exercising program to maintain working order. It's important to keep valves functional so they work when needed	\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to treat city water at well head locations as a best practice	\$\$	Short	High
Continue to perform fire-hydrant testing and flushing to keep the system in good working order (10-year rotation)	\$	Short	High
Implement well head protection plan (updated 2022) and new well head buffers for increased protection as part of the update to the Rockford Source Water Protection Plan. This may prohibit certain nearby land-uses within these protected areas	\$	Short	High
Rating of wells that are 25+ years, radon monitoring should continue	\$\$	Short	Medium
Identify, locate, and work to replace all residential lead service lines still left within the city	\$\$\$\$	Short	High

### Ensure all Rockford residents have access to city water as soon as possible

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to require that all new development be served by city water	\$\$	Short	High
Continue annexation efforts to reduce islands/pockets where users already have city water but don't pay city taxes, thus creating a greater burden for the other users of the system	\$\$	Short	High
Current users that are located in unincorporated areas by 2x water fees... Is this enough? Does it cover costs? Can we increase fees to encourage voluntary annexation?	\$	Short	Medium



Identify and upgrade aging water main infrastructure			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Assign risk score to all water mains based on condition and failure consequence levels to ensure proper replacement and service	\$\$	Medium	Low
Develop water main renewal forecast along with estimated annual costs estimates for maintenance and or future replacement	\$\$	Medium	Low
Develop and implement water main replacement funding	\$\$\$	Long	Medium
Coordinating transportation projects with water upgrades/maintenance with Four Rivers Sanitation Authority will save money and reduce duplicity	\$\$	Medium	High
Identify, locate, and work to replace all lead water lines in residential homes	\$\$\$\$	Short	High
Ensure all Rockford residents have access to sanitary sewer			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Work with Four Rivers Sanitation Authority to develop a plan for expansion that creates the least disruption to existing residential areas and works to mitigate any risks associated with sanitation system failures	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Develop sanitary sewer CIP and focus on specific basins needing the most attention based on risk	\$\$\$	Long	Low
Develop implementable scenarios with Four Rivers Sanitation Authority that work to alleviate issues that limit development due to restrictions or lack of water and sewer service altogether	\$	Long	Low
Develop and implement programs to decrease crime to improve actual and perceived public safety concerns			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Inventory and analyze existing public safety programs and communication platforms for improved real time information	\$	Long	Low
Continue implementation and operation of community policing strategy	\$\$\$	Short	High
Continue refining community metrics dashboards for neighborhood based crime reporting and mapping	\$	Short	Medium
Partner with local agencies and neighborhood associations to implement additional safe-routes-to-school by expanding the current system and routes	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue and increase funding for Rock House youth engagement	\$\$	Medium	High
Continue and increase funding for Focused Deterrence Programs	\$\$	Short	High
Utilize neighborhood groups and associations and the information they provide to aid in crime reduction- Identify problem properties and concentrate resources to them	\$	Short	High
Target property owners that have a history of issues related to crime	\$\$	Short	High

### Provide and support community dialogue on safety concerns and preventative solutions

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Involve business and property owners in crime-preventative measures	\$	Long	Medium
Support and expand neighborhood watch associations in neighborhoods and business districts especially where crime is more prevalent	\$	Medium	Low
Expand neighborhood safety summits for neighborhood organizations	\$	Long	Low
Revitalize Neighborhood Groups	\$	Short	Low

### Develop and implement technology platforms to improve crime reporting by residents and business owners

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Host tech-innovation weekends to design and develop solutions to complement existing means of communication	\$	Long	Low
Increase awareness and utilization of 411 tips hot-line	\$	Medium	Medium
Continue investing in, and expanding, both the perimeter as well as the density of, Shot Spotter technology to aid in the assistance of early location of shots fired incidences	\$\$\$	Short	High

### Continue engaging youth through the development and implementation of youth-oriented educational programming that specifically supports the reduction of crime committed by youth offenders

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Increase youth outreach efforts through existing Rockford Police Department programming	\$\$	Short	High
Facilitate dialogue within the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council for addressing issues concerning crime among the youth population	\$	Short	High
Support Rockford School District initiatives that decrease expulsion, truancy, and dropout rates to keep more kids in school	\$\$	Short	High
Continue and expand funding for the Rockford Workforce Development Initiative that focuses on sidewalk construction by offering jobs to at risk youth through City of Rockford Public Works Department	\$\$\$	Short	High
Rock House expansion	\$\$	Medium	High
Increase community center youth programs - Northwest Community Center, Booker, etc.	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Provide life skills for youth not traditionally taught in schools to help ensure success and financial literacy	\$\$	Medium	Medium

### Continue to develop and implement life-coaching and counseling opportunities for youth in supporting the reduction of crime

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Support active programming facilitated by existing outreach programs that target youth who have a history of committing crimes or high propensity to	\$\$	Long	Medium
Youth Services Network has many initiatives that align opportunities for at risk youth. These programs should continue to see funding	\$\$	Long	Medium

### Align with healthcare providers and institutions to mitigate barriers to access of health and wellness programs and outreach among low-income and aging populations at reduced rates

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Coordinate with Rockford Health Council to increase the number of individuals utilizing regular health care resources, and provide possible options for cost saving measures and increased awareness of programs	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Improve access to oral healthcare	\$	Long	Low
Collaborate with healthcare providers and institutions to improve awareness of benefits for the regular use of healthcare to reduce chances of preventable illnesses, and identify medical issues before they become major	\$	Medium	Low
Increase the density of health facilities to low-income residents of need	\$\$\$	Long	Low
Improve and reduce costs of transportation to facilities for health appointments especially among low income residents	\$\$	Long	Low
Work to reduce medical costs and burdens for lower income populations who are generally more likely to be affected by poor health outcomes	\$\$	Medium	Low
Find ways to utilize Javon Bae Hospital-Rockton that recently reduced inpatient services for the much needed west side of the city	\$\$	Short	Medium
Coordinate with assisted living facilities health care needs that are not being met- what are the shortfalls that could be addressed?	\$	Medium	Medium

### Support increased collaboration with healthcare providers and institutions to improve public health outcomes

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Improve awareness of preventative health care resources through coordination and alignment of additional funding sources	\$\$	Medium	Low
Increase access and availability of prenatal care resources to lower income residents	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Work to decrease the percentage of low-birth weight children	\$	Long	Low
Continue to support and expand awareness of addiction programs	\$	Long	Medium
Involve community centers and churches on initiatives and events initiated by the city services department	\$	Short	Medium
Coordinate with neighborhood organizations to identify interested groups that stopped meeting regularly or at all as a result of Covid-19	\$	Medium	Low



Provide convenient access to healthy food for all residents			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Facilitate the creation of more healthy food retail options and target typically under-served neighborhoods and population groups	\$	Long	Medium
Continue to support and expand the location of weekday and weekend farmer's markets	\$	Short	High
Continue to identify city owned properties that could support urban agriculture and community gardens and facilitate new locations for growing	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to partner with non-profit agencies to plant new community gardens on city-owned properties identified as suitable for urban agriculture	\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to offer funding for the start and ongoing maintenance of community gardens and locate those in need of funding through community outreach and public announcement of the programs	\$	Short	Medium
Integrate a food-systems analysis in all major land use decisions such as zoning, transportation planning, and the Comprehensive Plan	\$	Long	Low
Increase local food pantry support, funding, and other additional resources	\$	Long	Low
Rockford City Market should work to include more fresh produce and healthy food options as the season allows	\$	Short	High
Work to identify locations that are under-served by healthy food options that can connect to organizations promoting distribution of these foods	\$\$	Long	Low
Encourage gardens at home by providing free information and resources to residents (provide resources through NIU extension and local master gardeners)	\$	Medium	Low
Continue to support neighborhood gardens through information and funding by City of Rockford community actions agency, and services agency	\$	Medium	Medium
Support Local Foods Network			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to offer the commercial kitchen for rent at indoor City Market	\$\$	Short	Medium
Establish a commercial community kitchen to offer interactive learning on food preparation, safety, and entrepreneurial start-up opportunities in food	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to expand opportunities for local growers	\$	Medium	Low
Evaluate impediments to urban agriculture -Through administrative adjustments adjacent properties are notified before establishment. Plans following operation to revert lots back to original character- Through Zoning Office	\$\$	Long	Low
Update is needed for future land use map and create a new land use category for urban agriculture	\$	Short	Medium
Market suitable sites for indoor urban agriculture-contact others who have done this for advice- there has been interest locally by developers recently	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Support infrastructure for local and regional food processing and distribution locations	\$	Long	Low

Collaborate with local restaurants such as Olympic Tavern, Abreo, Magpie, Octane, Crust & Crumbles, Nursing Homes/Hospitals, and Crusader Clinic, for education on proper food consumption education; Churches could offer information and available land to be turned into a garden, could donate, or share	\$	Long	Low
<b>Increase the use of renewable energy sources to reduce financial and environmental costs</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Increase planning and coordination to promote clean, reliable, and affordable energy especially for those experiencing cost burdens	\$	Medium	Low
Work with providers to increase amount of energy produced by co-generation and waste capture facilities	\$\$\$	Long	Low
Ensure the reliability of power delivery to our residents and businesses, especially during times of need like extreme hot or cold weather	\$	Long	High
Continue to promote and develop solar energy farms in the city where land use allows, especially that serve low-income residents such as the recent Horsman Quarry Solar Site, while preserving future residential growth areas	\$	Medium	Medium
Promote and reduce the burdens associated with installation of wind turbine technologies on business and residential locations	\$	Long	Low
Look into solar installation on City Hall or City Yards, Fire Station, Police Station, Schools -Are there grants for installation of solar on public or government institutions?	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to work with solar installation companies to break down barriers to residential solar and sustainable energy installation projects in Rockford	\$	Short	Medium
<b>Improve energy efficiency through the modernization of energy delivery</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to collaborate and work with ComEd (Exelon) to implement the smart grid for Rockford	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue to integrate energy utility improvements with capital improvement projects	\$		
Encourage Best Practices such as burying electric lines with new construction	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
<b>Continue improving our codes and regulations to facilitate cost effective sustainable development with new builds and rehabs</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to work with historic preservation entities and code officials to reconcile the energy codes and preservation requirements currently in existence	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Energy Codes, windows, insulation vapor barriers, roof insulation, heat fans all need to be proactively enforced	\$	Short	High

## Locate telecommunication facilities in areas other than historic districts or in residential areas if possible

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Obsolete with the technologies of today, cell and 5G towers can be placed at greater distances or hidden	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Review existing code requirements and provide recommended modification to codes to protect historic character	\$	Long	Low

## Expand affordable access to broadband to all residents and businesses

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Support Wi-Fi hotspot initiatives targeting areas with low service coverage	\$	Long	Low
More provider options are needed to reduce high costs	\$	Medium	High
High speed internet options require the purchase of cable TV making it cost prohibitive for low-income residents	\$	Medium	Medium

## Expand access to broadband infrastructure to encourage technical innovation and recruitment of high-tech businesses

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue support for iFiber implementation and service expansion for residential and business use	\$\$\$	Short	High
Evaluate the installation of Wi-Fi infrastructure on city-owned assets	\$	Long	Low
5G communication towers should be placed where they are least noticeable	\$	Short	High
Address the technology gap being created, free cellphone programs in place but what about laptops/internet	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue to provide computers at public locations for people to find and apply for jobs. Computer skills needed for most employment functions	\$	Short	Medium
Increase access to public computers at locations such as libraries	\$	Short	Medium

## Support education and training opportunities for tech-related business startups and occupations

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Collaborate with NIU EigerLab and other technology cluster incubators to create advanced digital infrastructure for attracting and growing tech-related businesses	\$	Long	Low
Continue to support Rock Valley College Advanced Technology Center (ATC), CNC machining, mechatronics, truck driver training, welding, etc.	\$	Medium	Medium
Airport Training AAR, and internships for local businesses	\$	Long	Low
Increase public transportation options to employment clusters	\$\$	Medium	Medium



## Chapter Endnotes

- i. <https://rockfordil.gov/city-departments/public-works/water-division/about-the-water-system/>
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## PARKS, RECREATION, & PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

### Introduction & Background

The quality, quantity, and distribution of parks, recreational areas, and open space directly correlates to the livability of a region. A vibrant park system, and public recreational opportunities for all abilities, helps to increase our property values, stimulates economic development, decreases juvenile crime, and also improves our community's overall health standings. It's hard to put a number on the value of the ecosystem services that parks, open-spaces and forests provide, such as filtering our drinking water, cleaning our air, and helping to reduce high temperatures in the summer. Research shows that property values can be up to 20% higher if a home is located within 500 feet of a well maintained park. Parks and recreational facilities add to the region's economy by providing jobs, collecting user fees, and hosting sports events. Parks and public facilities can spur additional development, revitalization, and attract other investment. A vibrant and attractive parks system offers a higher quality of life for prospective new home buys and businesses looking to invest in a community. By keeping youth engaged through lessons, camps, sports programs and employment, the Rockford Park District helps decrease juvenile crime. Finally, parks and recreational facilities provide the opportunity to improve physical and mental well-being through exercise or recreation, which leads to a better quality of life all

### Inventory of Parks & Public Open Space

One of Rockford's greatest assets is the abundance of greenspace located within the region for the enjoyment of

both residents and visitors alike. One of the distinguishing features of the City of Rockford is the vast amount and beauty of the region's public open space, recreational trails and parks and playgrounds for families to enjoy.

### Open Space

Open space provides a number of benefits to the public including its value as an asset to communities. In addition to acting as a recreational amenity for residents and visitors, accessibility to open space has been shown to improve public health, improve rates of physical activity, and reduce social and financial impacts of major natural disasters. Designated open space also serves as a home for the region's diverse ecosystems of trees, plants, and animals. The Rockford region boasts an ample amount of open space, with Winnebago, Boone, and Ogle Counties collectively having over 21,000 acres. Many of these acres are public and private lands (with public access) owned by various state and local governments, park districts, conservation districts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and not-for-profits. While a significant portion of Rockford is urbanized, neighboring municipalities and county lands offer plentiful access to open space in the form of wetlands, nature and forest preserves, conservation easements, trails, public parks, and the largest state park in Northern Illinois, Rock Cut State Park. It only takes a short drive to be in very rural areas of the county.

Over 5,780 acres of open space are located within the Rockford city limits, making up approximately 62.2 percent of the open space in Winnebago County. In total,



Winnebago County has over 9,300 acres of open space with several notable preserves and greenways, such as Harlem Hills Nature Preserve (Loves Park), Kishwaukee River Forest Preserve (unincorporated Winnebago County), Nygren Hills Wetland Trail and Overlook (Rockton), and Stone Bridge Trail Land and Water Reserve (Roscoe). Within a short distance, Rockford residents can also access approximately 1,800 acres of open space in Boone County, which is predominantly owned and managed by the Boone County Soil & Water Conservation District, and over 10,300 acres in Ogle County. In the three counties, the dominant owners of open space are private entities, such as the Natural Land Institute (NLI), followed by the State of Illinois, local governments, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

## Parks

In addition to an abundance of forest preserves, natural areas and a state park, Rockford is served by an extensive local park system, which continues to be a strong foundation for the regions quality of life. Currently, 70 percent of Rockford residents live within a half-mile of a neighborhood park.

The majority of parks in Rockford are owned and maintained by the Rockford Park District (RPD). The RPD is the third largest parks and recreation system in Illinois and a three-time winner of the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation. The RPD is responsible for 4,612 acres of regional natural lands and parks, of which 2,243 acres are within Rockford. The figure below outlines these natural areas in more detail by size.

Acreage and Number of Facilities by Facility Type					
	All Properties		Within City Limits		
	#	Acres	#	Acres	% Acres In Rockford
Large Urban Parks	10	2,069	8	1,684	81%
Community Park	13	274	9	131	48%
Major River Park	8	41	8	41	100%
School Park	22	152	17	120	79%
Neighborhood Park	57	340	50	269	79%
Special Use Area	24	1,326	18	791	60%
Parkway	5	5	5	5	100%
Natural Resource Area	4	66	3	25	38%
Museum	4	164	4	164	100%
Connector Trail	3	43	2	1	3%
Not Specified	3	114	1	67	58%
Other	21	20	21	20	100%
Total	174	4,612	146	3,316	72%

Source: Rockford Park District

The Rockford region is considered the amateur sports capital of the Midwest, with RPD owning and operating many of the athletic facilities in the Rockford region, such as Mercyhealth Sportscore One and Two, UW Health Sports Factory indoor sports facility, Riverview Ice House, Carlson Ice Arena, and a multitude of golf courses scattered across Rockford. These facilities provide a wide array of recreational benefits to residents and visitors. In 2018, MercyHealth Sportscore Complexes and Indoor Sports Center were the top visited sites in Rockford and the surrounding area, bringing in 2,900,000 visitors. The Carlson and Riverview ice facilities together bring in approximately 532,200 annual visitors, while RPD's golf courses are also ranked at the top most frequented recreational facilities, with a collective visitation of nearly 195,000 people annually.

Mercyhealth Sportscore Two is the largest athletic field in the region. While this facility is located in Loves Park, it undoubtedly has an economic impact on Rockford as well. This complex features Wedgbury Stadium, which seats 2,500 spectators and hosts high attendance sporting events, such as IHSA State High School Soccer Finals, professional football games, national rugby finals, college rugby championships, and professional soccer games. Within the sports complex, there are concession and picnic areas, indoor and outdoor dining options, a tournament staging area for pictures, and a playground. Adjacent to the stadium is the Indoor Sports Center, a 60,000 square foot multi-sport indoor facility, which is complete with an indoor golf center, multi-sport soccer fields, volleyball/basketball courts, locker rooms, a sports equipment store, and restaurant. The venue can also accommodate a variety of events including conventions, expos, birthday parties, and festivals. Due to the amount of sporting events and programming available through this facility, this sporting destination is well known in communities outside of Rockford and spurs a large portion of the tourism revenue Rockford receives.

Additionally, Rockford is home to one of Illinois' limited number of equestrian centers, Lockwood Park. Lockwood Park Trailside Equestrian Centre and Children's Farm is home to a variety of animals and includes over 146 acres of natural area. It also offers a comprehensive trail system, playground, and picnic area. Lockwood Park is home to several summer camp options for those interested in horseback riding and/or agriculture, as well as week-long horseback riding lessons for kids ages three and up. Other events, such as Fall on the Farm, are programmed seasonally and draw a large number of Rockford's residents.

Rockford also has the third-largest indoor conservatory in the state, Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens, which opened in the fall of 2011. Located along the Rock River, Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens offers an 11,000-square foot indoor plant exhibition area where visitors can experience the intersection of art and nature. The area is complete with tropical plants, sculptures, and seating areas. The adjacent gardens include an outdoor eclipse lagoon, with two fountains and a waterfall, a pedestrian bridge, patio areas, and walkways connecting the conservatory to the Sinnissippi Rose Gardens. Floral displays change on a seasonal basis and different art exhibitions are debuted throughout the year. Complimentary to the nature walkthroughs, Nicholas Conservatory offers educational programming where children can learn about plant and animal species, workshops and lecture series for adults, and event space for receptions or weddings. It is also located right on the Rock River and adjacent to the Rock River Recreational Path.

The Rockford Park District has long been viewed as a major asset to this community for the quality, inclusiveness, and variety of facilities they provide for all ages and abilities. However, limited financial resources have left gaps in services and infrastructure provided by RPD. In order to address these gaps and other challenges facing the Rockford region, RPD engaged an estimated 37,000 individuals over a six-month process to inform the development of a five-year strategic plan in 2018. The action plan provides a series of recommendations that will help guide investment in the district's assets, along with decisions regarding underutilized park facilities and amenities. In addition, participant feedback regarding recreational needs is being used to determine areas to reinvest in, eliminate, or strategically add.

Key recommendations included:

- Expanding youth programming, leadership development and employment opportunities, refurbishing playgrounds and shelters, and providing new trending amenities and programs for youth, teens, and families;
- Repurposing Sportscore One to natural flood plain, and introducing other recreational opportunities that reduce overhead costs and sports field maintenance (fishing, conservation clubs, etc.);
- Enhancing investment in Clarence Hicks Memorial Sports Park; and
- Continuing to improve fields and facilities at Mercy-

health Sportscore Two.<sup>1</sup>

## Trail & Bikeway Facility Types

Trails and paths within Rockford offer unique opportunities for active transportation and provide connections to high-quality environmental corridors and parks. While trails and paths are often seen as a place for recreational opportunities and exercise, they can also be tools for non-motorized mobility and commuting throughout all seasons. In other words, some people use them for transportation. In the winter months, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are popular activities among those who utilize the trail systems. Ultimately, local trails, paths, and bikeways are connectors that bridge the gap between larger interregional trails and neighborhoods or communities divided by major roads. Within Rockford, there are 98 miles of shared-use paths, as well as 57 miles of bikeways, providing a total of 155 miles in active transportation opportunities on designated facilities.

Some of the most prominent multi-use trails in the Rockford region are listed below.

- Anna Page Park Trails: This park is home to a number of trails for mountain bicyclist and equestrian users. In combination with Lockwood Park, these trails wind through five miles of natural wooded land.
- Atwood Trails: Atwood Park has approximately five miles of multi-use trails for beginner and intermediate users, a parking area, trail signage, and a bike wash/repair station.
- Rock River Recreation Path: Coming to fruition through a bicentennial community project in 1976, the Rock River Recreation Path is one of the oldest and most scenic paths in the system. This path travels by the YMCA, Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens, Shorewood Park, and Martin Park. Along the trail, visitors can view several notable sculptures and works of art, such as the Rockford Symbol and Rockmen Guardians.

Several neighborhood parks within Rockford also provide residents opportunities to enjoy walking or biking closer to home, including Dahlquist Park (0.43-mile walking path); Landstrom Park (0.75-mile paved path); Brown Park (0.5-mile paved path); Wantz Park (0.5-mile path); Mulford Crest Park (0.46-mile paved path); Levings Lake Park (1.3-mile paved roadway); Haight Park (0.32-mile path); and Midway Village Museum Loop (1.4-mile paved path).

More information on the City of Rockford's trail and bicycle facilities can be found on the RIPC interactive greenways map and the Rockford regional bicycle interactive mapping programs. Both platforms show the shared-use paths and existing bicycle facilities within the Rockford region, including information on facility type, length, signage, markings, and agency ownership.

## Greenways

Greenways connect existing areas of open space to other lands within our region. While a greenway can be considered a part of a larger ecological system, it can also be any open spaces or landscaped paths that facilitate pedestrian and bicycle movement and recreation. Although many greenway plans focus on trail networks, the Rockford region's plan considers both trail and natural area networks that also connect wildlife from one area to another.

Greenways are similar to arteries connecting vital organs together into one cohesive unit. They are part of a network of green infrastructure, linking together parks, preserves, wetlands, unique habitats, and other environmentally sensitive areas, spanning across urban and rural lands. They provide an opportunity for the natural circulation of plants and animals from one habitat to another, and even through or across features that act as barriers. Greenways are not only planned and managed for their natural resource value, but also for the associated benefits and services they provide to people and communities, including the promotion of active transportation and the resulting health benefits.<sup>ii</sup>

Greenway network maps typically display a region's robust greenways system, which facilitates a better understanding and awareness among local jurisdictions and the general public. One of the major functions of the Rockford region's greenways map is to serve as a navigational resource for individuals looking to take advantage of the region's open spaces. The 2021 greenways map provides an overview and illustrates the basic functionality of the greenway network by highlighting the spatial relationship between trails, transportation infrastructure, water resources, environmentally sensitive areas, and publicly and privately protected lands. The greenways plan also aids in the acquisition of new property by the park districts and forest preserves, especially areas that are listed as environmentally sensitive or as priority acquisition areas.

Currently, a corridor study for the main branch of Keith Creek, which runs right through the southern portion of downtown Rockford, is underway. RIPC has partnered with the consultant team of The Lakota Group, Studio GWA, Strand Associates, and Hey and Associates. The purpose of this plan is to create a vision for Keith Creek and development of a comprehensive creek corridor analysis of the main branch of Keith Creek, including socio-demographic metrics, access to transportation, and environmental conditions. The main purpose of this project is to find funding to develop a new greenway to connect to existing parks, recreational areas, and community assets to extend the network of paths and trails within our region. Ultimately, this project needs to address stormwater mitigation and urban flooding along this corridor as a whole in order to be successful.





## City Markets & Other Open-Air Market Events

An open-air market, also known as a farmers market or city market, is a public marketplace where food, produce, and merchandise is bought and sold. Many farmers markets are seasonal and usually held during the summer and early fall, correlating with peak harvest seasons and good weather.

Farmers markets have become increasingly popular for consumers and communities, and have proven to be important economic outlets for many farmers and small businesses. When food is produced, distributed and sold within the same region, the money stays in the local economy. Additionally, farmers markets provide opportunities for small farmers and businesses to sell their products directly to consumers, and meet a growing demand for locally produced food and goods. Being able to directly supply their goods provides farmers income opportunities without additional costs associated with shipping. This ability makes farmers markets cost-effective for vendors and consumers alike. Additionally, these markets have the potential to increase access to healthy food in disadvantaged areas depending on their location and price.

### Rockford City Market

One of the most popular markets in the Rockford region is the Rockford City Market, which opened on June 11, 2010, with nearly 1,000 visitors. Since opening, the market has expanded its footprint, secured over 70 vendors, and attracts an estimated 100,000 visitors per season. Rockford City Market is open every Friday starting mid-May and runs through the end of September, with hours typically between 3:30 pm and 8:30 pm. It is located in downtown Rockford at the intersection of Water Street and East State Street.

Rockford City Market is known for bringing together local farmers, crafters, artisans, and musicians to celebrate what Rockford has to offer. Rockford City Market focuses on local products and small business development by giving priority to vendors within a 150-mile radius of the city. By promoting the sale of local products, it offers the opportunity for local entrepreneurs and businesses to test and refine their products, encouraging business incubation and success. Because it showcases local food, goods and services, the market is able to act as a driving force behind community enhancement, increasing access to fresh produce, facilitating social connection, and highlighting the local culture of the community.



Rockford City Market

While Rockford City Market started as an open-air market, in 2018 the Indoor City Market building was opened as an indoor market that is open year-round with varying tenants. It is located across from the Rockford City Market on 116 North Madison Street and has two rental spaces, the Bowtruss Room and Market Hall, available for weddings, corporate events, or other special events year-round.<sup>iii</sup>

Over the years, the Rockford City Market has expanded allowing for supplementary initiatives to take shape. Current programs and initiatives associated with the Rockford City Market are:

- **Incubator Kitchen:** The Incubator Kitchen offers a commercial grade kitchen on the top floor of the Indoor City Market building to be rented by someone who wants to start up a catering or other food-related business. The kitchen comes with a manager, as well as a double-deck gas convection oven, a ten-burner gas range, 60-quart planetary mixer, char-broiler, reach-in freezer and coolers, stainless steel prep tables, storage shelves, and baking sheets and small wares. Bookings for the kitchen are available seven days a week/24 hours a day and can be used through a contract agreement or for occasional users.
- **Vintage Market:** Started by Rock River Development Partnership in 2015, this one-day-only market focuses on vintage, and vintage-like, vendors with quality vintage, antique and re-purposed items, such as home and garden goods, furniture, clothing, jewelry, art, and children's items. Admission is free and features food, beverages, and entertainment for shoppers.
- **Creative Studio:** On the second floor of the Rockford City Market building is a Creative Studio, encompassing 748 square feet. The studio is available to rent and offers space for individuals to host their next production project.

Amenities that are provided with the rental space include private restrooms, a mini fridge, microwave, three vanities with seating, a velvet sofa, full length mirror, clothing racks, and vintage-inspired chandelier. Prices vary depending on length of time rented.

### Other Farmers Market

In addition to the City Market, Rockford has a number of other farmer and open-air markets, of which are listed below.

- **Edgebrook Farmers Market:** The Edgebrook Farmers Market is open every Wednesday from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm during the summer and fall months.



Edgebrook Farmers Market

- **Forest City Church Farmers Market:** Previously the Heartland Community Church (HCC) Market, holds a weekly farmer's market in their parking lot, every Friday from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm Mid-May through Mid-October.



Forest City Church Farmers Market

- **North End City Market:** The North End City Market is located at the southeast corner of North Main and Auburn Streets, and runs on Saturday mornings from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm.



North End City Market

- **Pasqua Mercato:** Pasqua Mercato is a seasonal open-air Italian market located along East State Street. The market is open on Sundays from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm during the months of June, July, and August.



Pasqua Mercato Open Air Italian Market

- **Rockford Midtown Farmers Market:** Located at 502 Seventh Street, the Midtown Farmers Market is open 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Thursday mornings from June to September. Rockford Midtown Market encourages a community gathering for ethnic food, farm produce, coffee drinks, kid activities, music, and crafts.



Rockford Midtown Farmers Market



# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## PARKS, RECREATION, & PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

### Maintain and expand open space along the Rock River corridor for recreational use and other silent sports

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Support further implementation of the Riverfront Walkway Plan by filling in remaining gaps	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
Prioritize linking the Morgan Street Bridge path to Sports Factory path utilizing the parcel that ComEd currently owns but won't allow access to	\$\$\$	Short	High
Fill in gaps using logical termini planning methods, starting with easiest sections and working the way up to harder to finish gaps that may have private ownership or other constraints to development	\$	Medium	Medium
Construct two-way, multi-modal, recreational paths over major bridges on the Rock River. Similar to the seasonal designated bike lane on State Street but with year round access	\$\$\$	Medium	High
Maintain and continue to install small resting areas along river corridor pathways, and other major recreational paths	\$\$	Medium	Medium

### Enhance and expand off street pathways, trails, and linear parks for both recreational and commuter uses

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue reducing all existing gaps along major bike trails and paths	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Connect city-wide parks to the existing protected natural areas of the regional greenway network	\$\$	Medium	Low
Find funding or grants to install bicycle and pedestrian counters on key trails and intersections for time of day counts. This will help to align funding opportunities with current and future needs, and work to improve safety as well as ensure that funding is utilized best	\$\$	Short	High

### Preserve and enhance walkability within city

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Extend the current network by targeting neighborhoods through infill development with high pedestrian use but currently with no infrastructure, or failed infrastructure to the point where it does not function, and people walk in the streets	\$\$	Medium	High
Analyze pedestrian infrastructure needs at or near bus stops and shelters to create more complete networks, especially between modes of travel that are generally connected (such as walking and public transit)	\$\$	Medium	Medium



Ensure all Rockford residents live within a 10-minute walk of a neighborhood park or a recreation center			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify opportunity sites available for parks, open space, and related public facilities on vacant land parcels	\$	Long	Low
Work with the Rockford Park District to prioritize and develop neighborhood parks in areas identified with service gaps	\$	Long	Low
Ensure proper maintenance and vibrancy of parks, public green space, and public facilities			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Assist the Rockford Park District with near and long-term planning for facilities in all planning areas	\$	Medium	Low
Assist the Rockford Park District with near and long-term land acquisition for the development of indoor and outdoor public facilities. The city should have more involvement in capital planning initiatives because of the direct and very great impact these decisions can have on the City of Rockford	\$	Long	Low
Coordinate with Rockford Park District to increase programming and events at the Indoor Sports Factory to pre-Covid levels, and more	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue assessment, remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Establish training and other community engagement programs to build capacity within community-based organizations in brownfield redevelopment planning and implementation	\$\$	Medium	Low
Create a green remediation guide for site remediation and improvement information regarding past, current, and possible future project locations	\$	Medium	Medium
Establish green remediation approaches for redevelopment of city land	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Study the economic value of brownfield redevelopment within the city boundary, rank properties with the highest return to market potential, and increased property value possibilities	\$\$	Short	Medium
Coordinate with the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) to market current vacant facilities and connect prospective businesses with unique properties prime for adaptive reuse with the possible need for remediation, or where cleanup has already occurred	\$\$	Short	Medium
Incentivize development in regions of the city where investment is stagnant or declining over the years			
Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Leverage public sector infrastructure development for private investment in stable and declining planning areas	\$	Long	Low
Evaluate and advance strategies with existing TIF District redevelopment plans	\$	Short	Medium

## Chapter Endnotes

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## ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

### Introduction & Background

The Rockford Region has an array of diverse rivers, lakes, and waterways – offering an abundance of recreational opportunities as well as natural resources that add value to our city. The region's four main rivers, the Rock River, Pecatonica River, Kishwaukee River and Sugar River, provide a wealth of resources that helped to foster rapid development throughout the 20th century. The region's largest river, the Rock River, flows for 163 miles in Illinois with a total length of about 318 miles and has a total area of 10,915 square miles. The Rock River originates in the Horicon Marsh in Dodge County, Wisconsin and flows in a generally southerly direction until it joins the Mississippi River at Rock Island, Illinois. The region's second largest river, the Pecatonica River, is 194 miles long. It originates in the hills of southwest Wisconsin and flows south and southeast until it receives the East Branch of the Pecatonica River, approximately eight miles north of the stateline. It then flows past Freeport, turns easterly, and receives the Sugar River near Shirland before joining the Rock River at Rockton, Illinois. Many of the region's municipalities have developed along these rivers, including Rockford. While there are many benefits provided by these rivers, whether as water resources or fertile agricultural land, they can also create a number of issues. Water quality is a public health concern and integral to human life, as it affects nutrition, overall health, and sanitation. Seasonal flooding has also caused issues along the Rock River over the years.

Flooding and pollution from agriculture, industrial, and stormwater runoff, have the greatest impact on the region's water resources. The Rockford region has been

experiencing more severe weather events in recent years with the most notable examples including periods of extreme flooding, prolonged periods of drought, intense thunderstorms, tornados, and higher heat indices. The impacts of these events have resulted in costly damage to personal property and public infrastructure, lost lives, and intensified strain on resources. Continued development in natural areas can lead to further and longer-term impacts from these events. Smart planning and management of water resources is key to the city's, and regions, overall resilience.





## Water Resources & Their Importance

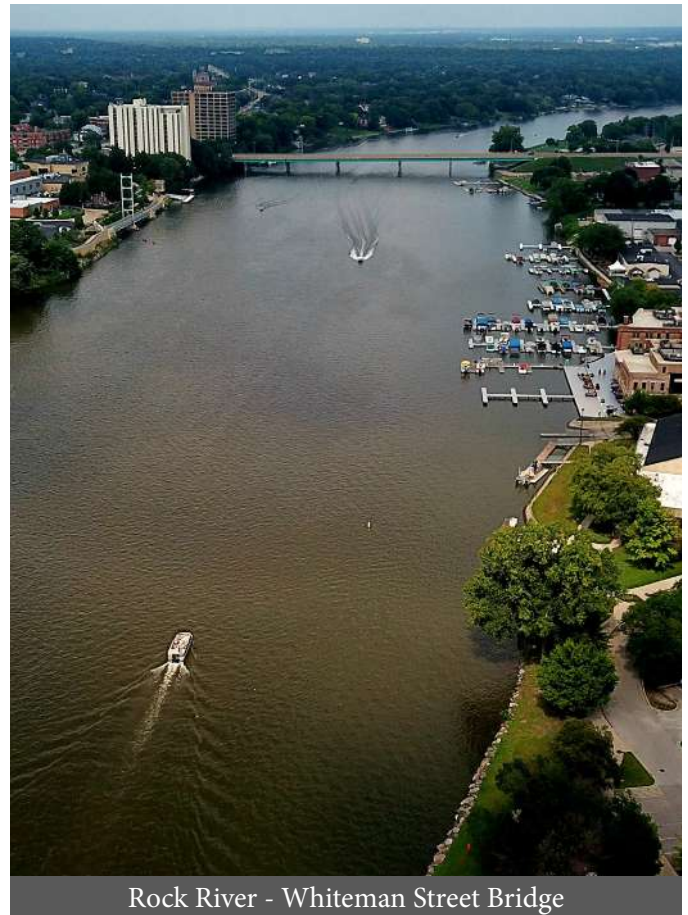
Water is one of the most essential resources on earth since it supports life, and the needs of both humans and the natural environment. Water shortages are continuing to increase in many regions, leaving people without access to adequate drinking water. According to the Illinois State Water Survey, demand for water in Illinois is likely to increase by up to 50 percent in the coming decades, with many water shortages resulting from drought, increased agriculture irrigation, and a lack of water supply planning.<sup>i</sup> While Illinois and the Rockford region is currently abundant in water resources with miles of streams, rivers, freshwater lakes, ponds and underground aquifers, the continued availability and quality of the water is pertinent to the success of the region. Because water does not care about political boundaries, planning for the protection of current and future water resources must begin locally, but requires regional planning efforts to be successful.

### Lakes

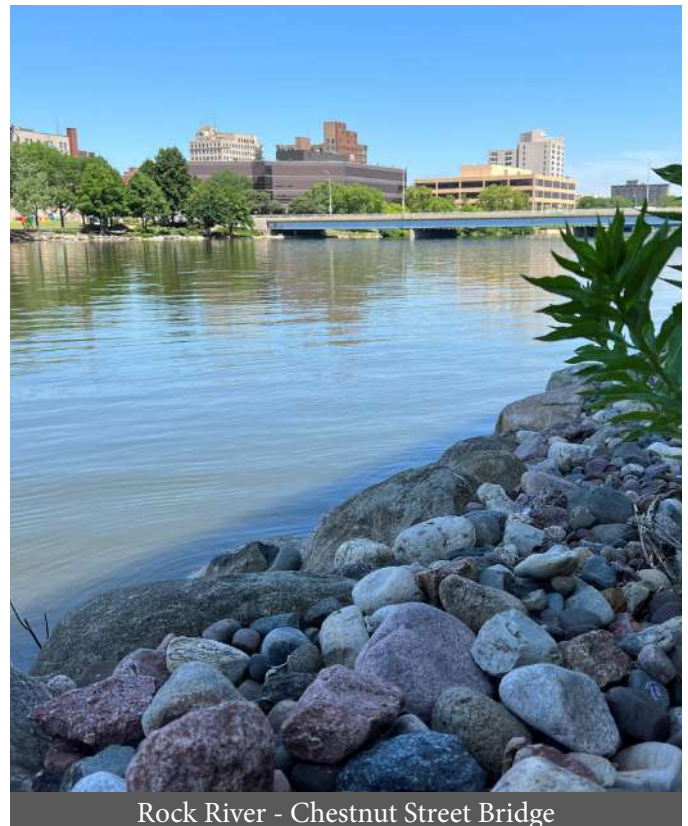
The City of Rockford predominantly contains rivers, ponds, and wetlands as far as water features go. There is only one publicly accessible lake within the city. Levings Lake is located on the west side of the city within Levings Park, which is operated by the Rockford Park District. Levings Park hosts the Sounds of Summer's Live at Levings Lake Talent Show, and concerts in June, July, and August each year.<sup>ii</sup> It is also home to the West Rock Wake Park, a premiere water sports experience where new or experience wake boarders of all ages can try the cable park facility located on Levings Lake. Water skiing is also available. Plans are currently underway to add additional amenities, as the wake boarding park has grown over the years and attracts visitors from all over.<sup>iii</sup>

### Rivers and Creeks

The Rockford region contains many high quality rivers and streams that are important to the overall health of the area. These major rivers, along with their tributaries, offer freshwater environments that are highly valued as natural and recreational assets. The Rock River is the largest of the rivers and flows near historic buildings, residential homes and parks, as well as separating the east and west sides of the City of Rockford. The Sugar and Kishwaukee Rivers are biologically significant streams with rich fish and mussel populations. Kinnikinnick, Beaver, Coon, Raccoon, Mosquito, Piscasaw, and Kilbuck Creeks are tributaries of the four main rivers and provide habitat for a diversity of species of plant and animal life, including healthy populations of mussels and cold-water species, like the Mottled Sculpin.<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, Keith Creek and Kent Creek flow



Rock River - Whiteman Street Bridge



Rock River - Chestnut Street Bridge





into areas of downtown Rockford and provide both habitat for wildlife, as well as recreational opportunities and even stormwater management in the way of water conveyance from runoff.

Wetlands

The 100-year floodplains of the rivers and tributaries in the area are important to regional biodiversity. The wetlands formed on these floodplains, as well as the land adjacent to these riparian zones, contain some of the most ecologically rich habitats. The protection of these areas is crucial to sustaining a thriving and diverse community of species and plants. Riparian zones can help reduce erosion, protect against environmental stressors and disturbances, such as flooding, and are key nesting and feeding grounds for endangered or threatened species. Within the City of Rockford, the 100-year floodplain encompasses 4,352 acres of land, while wetlands make up 1,647 acres.

City of Rockford Water Resources	
	Acres
Wetlands	1,647
Riverine	502
Freshwater Pond	51
Lake	367
Freshwater Emergent Wetland	302
Freshwater Forested/Shrub Wetland	424
100 Yr Floodplain	4,352

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Stormwater Management

Stormwater runoff occurs when precipitation from rain or snowmelt flows over land and is not able to infiltrate the surface material quick enough, and ends up as runoff. The addition of roads, driveways, parking lots, rooftops, and other surfaces that prevent water from infiltrating into the ground greatly increases the runoff volume created during storms. This runoff is swiftly carried to local streams, lakes, wetlands, and rivers; it can cause flooding, erosion, and wash away important habitat for flora and fauna that live in and around waterways. Stormwater runoff also picks up and carries with it many different pollutants that are found on paved surfaces, such as sediment, nitrogen, phosphorus, bacteria, oil and grease, trash, pesticides, and metals. It comes as no surprise then that stormwater runoff is the number one cause of stream impairment in urban areas, and Rockford is no different.<sup>v</sup>

To reduce the impacts of runoff on urban streams, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) expanded the Clean Water Act in 1987 to require municipalities to obtain permits for discharges of stormwater runoff. As a



result, many communities have adopted regulations requiring developers to install stormwater management practices that reduce the rate and/or volume and remove pollutants from runoff generated on their development sites.

Even with local regulations in place, flooding represents a substantial issue in the region. Many areas upstream are urbanized, resulting in fewer places for water to infiltrate the surface. With large weather events or downpours, significant flooding may occur which puts a strain on the region’s transportation infrastructure; local, state, and federal budgets; and the region’s economy. Rockford is impacted by three kinds of flooding: flash flooding, river flooding, and stormwater flooding. Flooding can be intensified by land use development and transportation infrastructure, especially when development occurs in identified floodplains. Early development in floodplains was common due to inexpensive, plentiful land, and a need at that time for municipalities to be located near major waterways. Urban developments are resource intensive, and repetitive damage from flooding events and subsequent reconstruction cycles that accompany these events is costly.<sup>vi</sup>

Stormwater flooding is more likely to occur in heavily urbanized areas because of the distance water has to travel to



infiltrate a porous surface. For context, the City of Rockford has budgeted over \$3 million per year for stormwater maintenance, repair, and mitigation efforts. Flooding will continue to be an issue for the city over the next 30 years. Stormwater mitigation should continue to be incorporated into the city's future planning and programming efforts. Some efforts the city has made are: the incorporation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) best management practices, pro-active property acquisition and demolition, conversion of land located in floodplains into open space, and investment in capital projects that mitigate flooding in certain areas (such as daylighting, improved drains to major waterways, or detention ponds).

Although Rockford has enacted and enforces a flood detention ordinance, it is largely inadequate when dealing with macro stormwater management and water quality. Requiring each new development to provide for detention on a piecemeal basis does not adequately address the larger stormwater management needs for various basins. The Department of Public Works has specifically identified the northeast and southeast as areas where further stormwater management plans need to be developed to identify better stormwater management facility locations.

### **Additional Water Quality Concerns**

Due to Rockford's industrial past, both surface and groundwater in the region has a higher chance of contamination. While lead is not present in Rockford's groundwater or treated drinking water, buildings with water service lines made of lead may corrode, resulting in drinking water contamination. In order to minimize exposure to lead in water, the city of Rockford has an interactive lead service line identification map to help assist residents in identifying where these contaminated lines are located. In addition, the newly commenced Lead Service Line Replacement Program includes the replacement of identified lead service lines throughout the city.

In 2019, in order to support clean water, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) conducted a statewide investigation into the prevalence and occurrence of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in finished water. While the IEPA PFAS testing study did not find Rockford water to be above the established health-based screening levels, Illinois EPA testing determined that two PFAS were detected in the water system at very low levels. In response to these findings, the Rockford Water Division is working to monitor PFAS levels through quarterly well site sampling beginning in January 2021.<sup>vii</sup>

## **Greenways Planning**

Greenways planning in the Rockford region focuses on the interconnected, region-wide network of linear open spaces that provide many benefits to the residents of Northern Illinois. The vision for regional greenway plans throughout Illinois was first conceived during the Governor's Workshop on Greenways and Trails held in Springfield in May 1995, launched by then Governor Edgar and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).<sup>viii</sup> The workshop led to the creation of a program designed to encourage and facilitate comprehensive, cooperative, and coordinated planning to protect high priority greenways and, where appropriate, provide public access by developing trails, by coordinating with local jurisdictions.<sup>ix</sup> This grant program would provide financial assistance for the creation of regional greenways plans. Funded plans were required to explicitly consider bike trail projects; identify priority greenway and trail projects; include an action plan identifying sequential activities and responsible parties; and consider potential linkages to state sites and trails, greenway and trail initiatives of statewide significance, and priority greenways and trails in neighboring communities, counties, and metro areas.

### **Past Greenway Planning Efforts in the Region**

Sparked by the new grant opportunity, a group of local agency staff and community citizens convened to discuss the development of a greenways plan for the Rockford region. Participants considered: "Does the region need a greenways plan? Who would facilitate the plan? How would this plan be created? Once it was created, how would it be shared with the region?" The answer was a resounding yes; the region should have a greenways plan. The group successfully received funding from the IDNR to develop a greenways map and plan document and began a collaborative effort to identify existing trails, paths, and future linkages within the system.<sup>x</sup>

The purpose of the plan was to:

- Create a vision of a regional greenway network and provide a framework for coordinated greenway and trail preservation and development;
- Assist implementing and funding agencies in allocating resources in support of the plan;
- Initiate a continuing forum for discussion and resolution of greenway issues among governmental jurisdictions and the private sector;

- Provide a basis for coordinating transportation, water quality, storm and flood water, and other programs with existing and proposed greenways to advance greenway preservation and reduce conflicts with other development activities; and
- Increase the level of understanding regarding the importance and value of greenways and encourage stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

After an extensive public engagement process, the finalized map was published in December of 1997.

A second edition of the map was produced in 2004 with funding assistance from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, the Rockford Area Transportation Study, and participating agencies. The second edition incorporated updated additions to the network and new inclusions in mapping criteria.

The third iteration of the Greenways Plan was completed in 2011. Primary development of the plan was brought under the responsibility of the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP), now Region 1 Planning Council, with assistance from the region's resource agencies, in order to better integrate transportation and environmental planning initiatives. The 2011 edition was the first time the map was developed in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), making the data shown on the map

available to partner agencies for analyses and visualization purposes. The initial GIS work and data from Winnebago County Geographic Information Systems (WINGIS) was provided by a consultant in Chicago.

In 2015, the Greenways Map was updated again and accompanied by a planning document that outlined a regional strategy to guide future greenways efforts. At this time the Greenways Map and Planning Document was developed completely in-house.

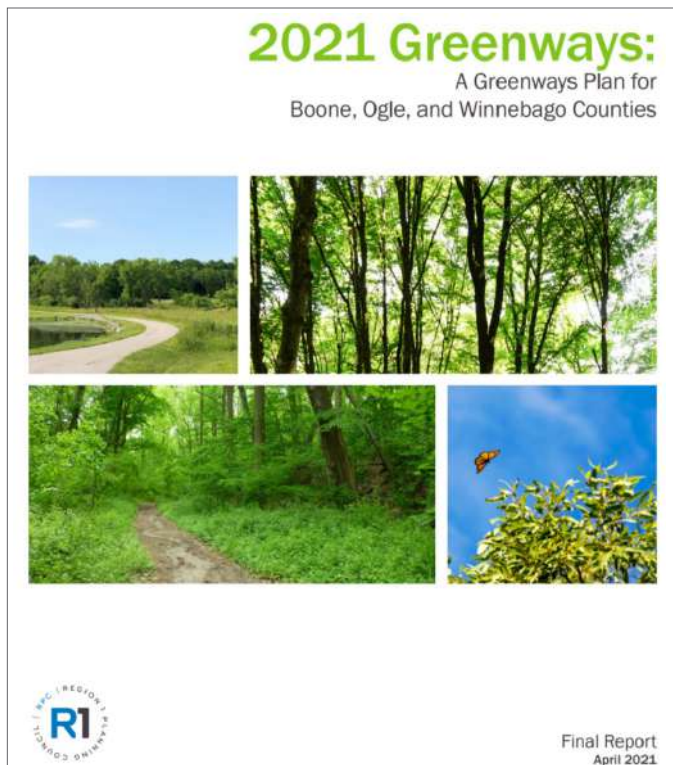
### Current Greenways Map and Plan

To continue the preservation of the region's rich natural heritage, a group of partner agencies and community organizations met to discuss an update to the greenway plan.

2021: A Greenways Plan for Boone, Ogle, and Winnebago Counties. The Greenways Working Group was comprised of representatives from each of the major environmental planning and advocacy groups in the region, as well as citizens with environmental and planning backgrounds.

Now in its fifth iteration, the 2021 Greenways Plan and Map works to promote a regional greenway network that protects natural and cultural resources, supports equal access to green space; provides alternative forms of transportation and recreational benefits; enhances environmental and scenic qualities; and stimulates sustainable, equitable economic development. This plan and map serve as a comprehensive regional planning tool that helps leverage and secure additional funds for government agencies, nonprofits, and others involved in transportation and land use planning, sustainability initiatives, natural areas preservation, and recreation. The goals of the current iteration of the Greenways Plan include:

- Protect the natural and cultural resources in the region for all;
- Provide recreational benefits for safe, convenient, and comfortable alternative transportation options;
- Enhance the environmental and scenic qualities of the greenways in a manner relevant to the community;
- Stimulate equitable economic development; and
- Increase education and awareness regarding the importance and value of greenways and encourage the stewardship of natural resources.



## Air Quality

Air quality in the region is an important environmental factor that can have both positive and negative effects on the quality of life. Air quality is measured nationally by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) through the Air Quality Index (AQI) Data Report and is supplemented by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA). The AQI is an annual summary of all pollutant data for a core-based statistical area (CBSA), such as the Rockford region. This is considered the best measure of air quality as it shows all criteria air pollutants in a given geographical area. These criteria pollutants include particulates such as carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. According to the EPA, the transportation sector generated roughly 29 percent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions nationally in 2020, followed closely by the electricity production sector at 25 percent, and industrial sector at 23 percent of GHG emissions.<sup>xi</sup> The burning of fossil fuels, such as petroleum, commonly used in transportation, accounts for the largest percentage of emissions the region faces. While electricity production also increases emissions, most of the Rockford region's energy comes from nuclear, which tends to be a cleaner option than its counterparts.

The Clean Air Act set national standards for air quality for pollutants that are identified as harmful to public health. The NAAQS provides primary standards (e.g. protection of public health), and secondary standards (e.g. protection of property and the environment) for different groups. Based on these standards, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assigns two designations, attainment or non-attainment, to counties. Currently, Winnebago County, which includes Rockford, meets the EPA's standards and is classified as in attainment status. Attainment versus non-attainment statuses can greatly impact the permitting, construction, and operations of infrastructure projects, but does open the door for additional funding sources.<sup>xii</sup>

Data indicates that the Rockford Region continues to maintain a "good" air quality status across all of the pollutants tracked. Of the 365 days tracked in 2020, the region had 284 days with good air quality (77.6 percent), 81 days of moderate air quality (22.1 percent), and one day of unhealthy air quality for sensitive groups (0.3 percent). The figure below lists the air quality statistics for the past ten years.

Air Quality Index Report (2011-2021)											
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Days with AQI	363	366	363	342	362	354	354	362	341	366	55
Days Good	327	313	340	306	311	316	317	316	240	284	31
Days Moderate	35	47	23	34	50	35	37	43	100	81	24
Days Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	1	6	-	2	1	3	-	2	1	1	-
Days Unhealthy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Days Very Unhealthy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AQI Max	115	115	84	105	108	105	87	151	102	101	95
AQI 90th Percentile	50	61	48	51	54	51	51	54	61	61	75
AQI Median	32	33	31	34	35	34	35	35	42	39	47

Source: Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) - Air Quality Report 2011-2021

## Brownfields

A brownfield is a property or site complicated by the presence, or potential presence, of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.<sup>xiii</sup> Many of these properties are found within older areas of a city, such as downtown, and especially at former industrial sites. Brownfields exist in a number of forms: as abandoned industrial factories, gas stations, dry cleaners, landfills, and any other industrial or commercial sites where prior uses introduced contaminants into the environment. Alternatively, a greenfield is an undeveloped site free of hazardous waste, inexpensive, and unconstrained by urban infrastructure that can be developed more quickly, at lower upfront cost, and without the legal constraints of a brownfield or previously developed site.<sup>xiv</sup> Most greenfield development occurs on the outer edges of the city limits because this is generally where undeveloped sites are located. Financial costs, time constraints, and the legal burden of preparing a brownfield for development can deter investment. Meanwhile, developers are often more attracted to greenfields outside the urban core.<sup>xv</sup>



It is important for the city to address brownfields for a number of reasons including improving public health, the economy, and public safety. While brownfields lie idle, the sites have the potential to negatively impact public health by polluting local air and groundwater supplies which burdens local neighborhoods with health challenges. Living in proximity to abandoned and disinvested sites may also affect mental health and a sense of safety for community residents, and especially for children who may use these areas to play.

From an economic perspective, brownfields may deplete local tax bases, decrease surrounding property values, cause personal illness, sickness or disease and can attract illegal activities. A 2017 study concluded that cleaning up brownfield properties led to residential property value increases of 5-15.2 percent within 1.3 miles of the sites. Analyzing data near 48 of those brownfields, another study found an estimated \$29 to \$97 million in additional tax revenue for local governments for a single year after clean-up—two to seven times more than the \$12.4 million the EPA contributed to the cleanup of those brownfields. Initial anecdotal surveys also indicate a reduction in crime in recently revitalized brownfields areas. With brownfields disproportionately burdening marginalized, low-income, and high minority neighborhoods, it is important to redevelop them in a timely manner, to focus on beneficial and equitable reuse of sites, and to recognize the potential they hold for transforming communities and increasing community health.<sup>xvi</sup>

Revitalizing brownfield sites can also provide numerous environmental benefits to the community. In 2020, a study completed by the United States EPA looked at the environmental benefits that occur as a result of a brownfield site being redeveloped. The study also found that when housing and job growth is the focus of brownfield redevelopment projects, the expansion of paved/impervious surfaces, average vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita, and per job are reduced as compared to accommodating the same amount of growth on previously undeveloped sites.<sup>xvii</sup> This is partially due to the fact that brownfield sites are often located in the downtown corridors where infill development puts less strain on existing facilities and services due to their existence prior to construction.

Like most other former industrial cities, Rockford has a number of brownfield sites. For almost 20 years, the City of Rockford, its community stakeholders, and engaged constituents have worked closely together to assess and cleanup perceived and confirmed environmental hazards present at many valuable redevelopment sites in our com-

munity, especially in old industrial areas.<sup>xviii</sup>

A 2012 inventory identified approximately 970 brownfield properties within the City of Rockford. As of 2021, that number decreased to 854, covering around 780 acres of the city's land. The city recognizes that clean-up and redevelopment of these underutilized and potentially contaminated properties is a key component in fostering economic growth and improving blight. The city has been successful in applying for and using Federal and State Brownfields Grant Funds dating back to 2000, when the city was selected as one of the original EPA Brownfield Pilot Programs.

One step the city is taking is actively seeking interested parties to partner with on redeveloping city acquired brownfield properties. With a variety of local development incentives available and our ability to secure and leverage several state and federal funding sources, the city has established itself nationally as a model community in the brownfield redevelopment market.<sup>xix</sup>

A few successful brownfield redevelopment projects completed include:

- UW Health Sports Factory Campus (305 S Madison Street),
- Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront & Rockford Conference Center (416 S Main Street),
- Stanley J. Rozkowski United States Courthouse (327 S Church St),
- Save-A-Lot Grocery Store (1701 W State Street), and
- Former TAPCO Warehouse (222 Cedar Street).

Due to the city's extensive industrial heritage and proactive approach at brownfields revitalization, it is common for the City of Rockford to have several concurrent brownfields projects occurring at various stages.

Current active projects, include:

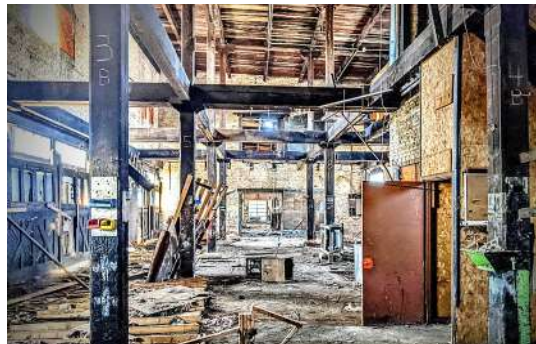
- Rockford Watch Factory Asbestos Abatement (325 S Madison Street),
- Lloyd's Hearing Building Contaminated Soil Removal (128 Kishwaukee Street),
- Southwest Rockford Revitalization Planning, and
- Community-Wide US EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant.



Some potential future brownfield redevelopment projects include:

- Former Rockford Watch Company Factory (325 S. Madison Street)
- Chick House Hotel (119 S Main Street)
- Historic Rockford Armory (605 Main Street)
- Historic Walgreen's/Trek Media Building
- South Main Rail Yards Parcels
- and Church School (1411 Blaisdell Street)

In July of 2023 Rockford City Council approved the Barber Colman redevelopment project with Milwaukee based developer J. Jeffers. This 26-acre former industrial site, located off South Main Street will be named Colman Ards and is soon to become a mixed-use space of commercial and residential property at a scale and level of development that the region hasn't seen in a long time. A project of this scope and design could very well act as a catalyst that spurs additional economic growth resulting in an overall revitalization of this area of the city.





# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

### Protect the groundwater supply and enhance drinking water quality

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Implement Source Water Protection Program (SWPP) that was recently updated in 2022	\$\$	Medium	High
Optimize existing, and add new, water treatment facilities as needed to meet future population demands, and meet required drinking water regulations, while continuing to treat water at the wellhead locations	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to support and conduct annual water main flushing program	\$	Short	High
Continue to inspect industrial and commercial properties to reduce illicit discharges into the ground and streams	\$	Short	High
Continue residential backflow inspections yearly requirement for residential irrigation systems	\$	Short	Medium
Continue lead service replacement program	\$\$\$	Short	High

### Protect the aesthetic quality of waterways for recreational use

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Complete next phase of the Rock River waterfront pathway system filling in the existing gaps to create logical termini	\$\$\$\$	Medium	High
Evaluate water transportation services to connect Riverfront activity centers	\$	Long	Low
More docks at local businesses, city market dock, and more public docks downtown to attract visitors	\$\$	Short	High
Partner with private and non-profit organizations to implement pedestrian-friendly streetscapes connecting neighborhoods to local waterways	\$\$	Short	Medium
Improve access to waterways with ADA access	\$\$\$	Medium	High

### Maintain and enhance local watershed protection efforts

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Identify impaired or damaged wetland sites for restoration projects	\$\$\$	Medium	Low
Complete waterway planning for Kent and Keith Creeks. Keith Creek Greenways Study underway for recreation and water quality, 319 study	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
Secure funding to follow through with implementation of Keith Creek Greenways Study	\$\$\$\$	Medium	Low

### Protect floodways and floodplains from unnecessary development

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Develop an inventory of best practices to support neighborhoods impacted by flood map changes	\$	Long	Low



Complete watershed studies and plans as needed	\$\$	Medium	Low
Continue to promote greenways map and planning document	\$	Short	Low
Continue locating city parcels for stormwater retention where flooding occurs after heavy rain events to reduce residential flooding issues	\$\$\$	Short	Medium
Zoning- Continue to enforce suitable building/development outside floodplain according to existing ordinances	\$	Medium	Medium
<b>Protect mature trees and maintain required landscaping</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue to evaluate street tree policy and responsibilities to encourage more tree-planting	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue to record and track city trees in right-of-way (ROW) in GIS database that's regularly maintained	\$\$	Medium	Low
Continue to include tree planting as part of stormwater management	\$	Short	Medium
Evaluate tree protection ordinance	\$	Medium	Low
Continue to require, based on ordinance, landscape plans that meet existing minimum requirements as part of the review process, especially for parking lot design and roadway frontage design	\$	Short	High
Evaluation of landscaping and enforcement of requirement/ordinance as part of Strategic Review Team (SRT)	\$	Short	High
Continue partnering with public agencies, non-profit, and private sector entities to maintain and enhance the tree planting program with a variety of native species and locations	\$\$	Short	Medium
<b>Improve the convenience and ease of recycling</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Continue installing recycling receptacles in areas with high pedestrian use	\$	Short	Medium
Partner with the Rockford Public Schools to develop programming to maintain and expand awareness of recycling for grades K-12	\$	Long	Short
<b>Reduce the City's solid waste footprint</b>			
<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Increase recycling within households, public, private, and non-profit sectors	\$	Long	Short
Incentivize city vendors to recycle, recover, and reuse materials	\$	Long	Short
Collaborate with regional partners to develop shared E-waste recycling program-Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue collecting curbside yard waste and providing free local mulch at the city yard	\$\$	Short	High

**Continue to remediate brownfields that have a high potential for redevelopment if there were no environmental issues creating restrictions**

issues creating restrictions	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Continue to identify brownfields in locations that could see the benefit of the property being utilized again	\$	Short	Medium
Continue maintaining the brownfields inventory in GIS	\$\$	Medium	High
The reuse of a priority redevelopment site(s) will research the feasibility of including renewable energy from wind, solar, or geothermal energy in the remediation plans	\$\$	Medium	Medium
The reuse of a priority redevelopment site(s) will incorporate energy efficiency measures into the construction	\$\$\$	Medium	Medium
The project reuse strategy for a priority redevelopment site(s) will consider climate adaptation and/or mitigation measure	\$\$	Long	Medium
The city should continue to have a full time Brownfields Redevelopment Specialist on staff	\$\$	Short	High
Incorporate public access, paths, and docks along riverfront. Especially the Rock River Path to South Park and Morgan St. Bridge. Continue to fill in gaps along riverfront as brownfields are redeveloped.	\$\$\$	Short	High

## Chapter Endnotes

- i. <https://investigatemidwest.org/2017/06/20/uncharted-waters-illinois-water-use-issues-exacerbated-by-irrigation-lack-of-water-supply-planning/>
- ii. <https://rockfordparkdistrict.org/levings-park>
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- v. 2050 Metropolitan Transportation plan for the Rockford Region
- vi. 2050 Metropolitan Transportation plan for the Rockford Region
- vii. <https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/water-quality/pfas/Pages/default.aspx>
- viii. 2021 Greenways: A Green Infrastructure Plan for Boone, Ogle, and Winnebago Counties
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- xi. <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>
- xii. 2050 Metropolitan Transportation plan for the Rockford Region
- xiii. <https://rockfordil.gov/city-departments/community-and-economic-development/long-range-planning/brown-fields/>
- xiv. <https://mnbrownfields.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Benefits-of-Brownfield-Redevelopment-2019.pdf>
- xv. <https://mnbrownfields.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Benefits-of-Brownfield-Redevelopment-2019.pdf>
- xvi. <https://www.cclr.org/brownfields-healthfields-opportunities#:~:text=While%20brownfields%20lie%20idle%2C%20they,value%2C%20and%20attract%20illegal%20activity>
- xvii. <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/brownfields-program-environmental-and-economic-benefits>
- xviii. <https://rockfordil.gov/city-departments/community-and-economic-development/long-range-planning/brown-fields/>
- xix. <https://rockfordil.gov/city-departments/community-and-economic-development/long-range-planning/brown-fields/>





## ARTS, CULTURE, & HISTORIC LANDMARKS

### Introduction & Background

Rockford has always been a culturally diverse city with a unique assortment of neighborhoods and historically significant properties, parks, art, and landmarks. Today Rockford continues to be home to a rich, robust and distinctive cultural environment, with a variety of art mediums, artists, nonprofit cultural organizations, farmers markets, street fairs and festivals, sports venues and arenas, theaters, amphitheaters, and more. The regions artistic, cultural, and historic assets continue to attract and entertain millions of people each year. Rockford's art and cultural resources are not only something to be proud about and to enjoy, but they also contribute significantly to the region's economy. While entertainment, art, cultural activities, and history are sometimes sidelined and seen as a nice "extra" they are necessary elements for making communities attractive and a vibrant places to spend time whether as a resident or visitor.

### Arts & Cultural Attractions

Arts and culture are key components for building community pride, supporting new development, nurturing health and well-being, and contributing to the diversity within a city. Arts and culture provide a better understanding of the city's past and how it will be remembered in the future. According to Americans for the Arts, public art can be a distinguishing part of a city's public history and showcase its evolving culture over time. Cities should be places where people want to live and visit, especially as a strong community identity is becoming increasingly more important in those decisions. The City of Rockford,

local businesses and non-profits, and the public strongly support public art and cultural attractions as a way to bring people together, create unity, and to beautify otherwise bland facades.

### Painted Murals

There is a strong recognition of the importance of public art in Rockford that can be seen in the growth of the city's collection of painted murals. As of 2022, there were 32 murals throughout the city as a result of several successful mural programs, including the CRE8IVE Art Festival, ArtsPlace, and the Audubon Mural Project.

The city gained a majority of its murals through the CRE8IV Transformational Arts Festival. The festival was created as part of the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's (RACVB) placemaking and beautification initiative. CRE8IV is a community-building, art infused event that was first held in 2019 and included nine large scale murals in downtown Rockford by eight artists. Each day of the festival was celebrated with a free block party at one of the mural locations. The festival was funded largely by a grant received from the Illinois Department of Commerce's Office of Tourism and a local match that was raised through personal investments, sponsorships, and donations. Since 2019, CRE8IV has added 20 more murals throughout the Rockford region and there is a goal to add five to seven additional murals each year.<sup>1</sup>





316 W. State Street (near Stewart Square)



401 E. State Street (in Wired Cafe Alley)

Another mural program within Rockford is the ArtsPlace Program, which was established by the Rockford Area Arts Council (RAAC) in 1969 with a mission to support, promote, and develop access to arts for everyone, particularly school age children.<sup>ii</sup> The ArtsPlace Program is an apprenticeship program for students ages 14 through 18.

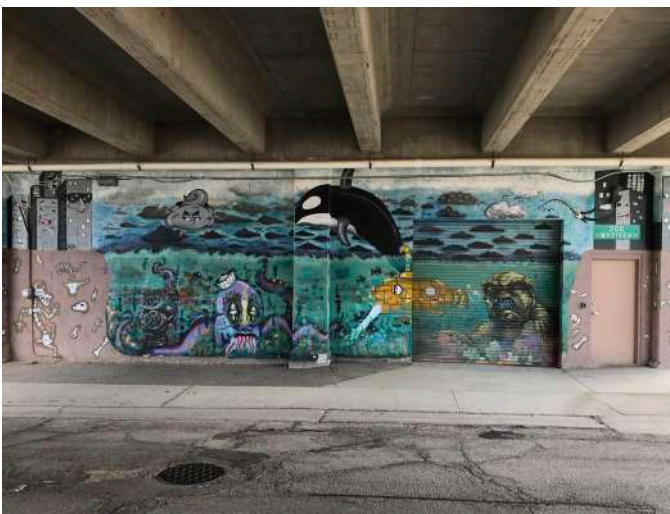
This program is responsible for two of the murals found under the Jefferson Street Bridge.



320 S. Wyman Street (Davis Park)



Jefferson Street Bridge Underpass & Market Street



299 N. Madison Street (under Jefferson Street Bridge)

Additionally, the Audubon Mural Project helped support the creation of three murals within Rockford, one of which was created as a part of the CRE8IV Transformational Arts Festival. The Audubon Mural Project was brought to Rockford by the Sinnissippi Audubon Society as a way to bring awareness to birds that were featured in the National Audubon's birds and climate change report.





Baltimore Oriole, Brett Whitcare (203 N. Church Street)



Yellow-headed Blackbird, by Therese Rowinski (317 Market Street)

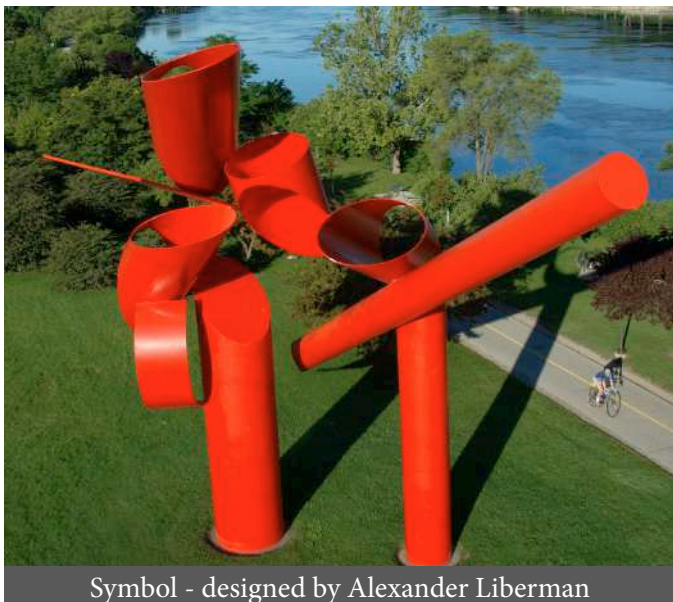


Golden Crowned Kinglet, by Lincoln Middle School students (corner of 9th and State Streets)

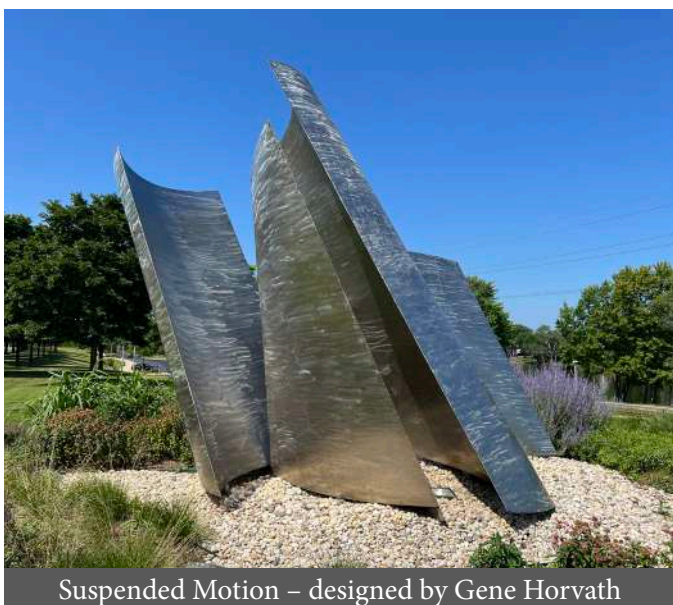
### Sculptures

Rockford is also home to a variety of permanent and visiting sculptures of varying artistic styles and materials. Some of the city's most notable permanent sculptures are located along the Rock River Recreational Path. These sculptures are maintained by the Rockford Park District, in cooperation with the Rockford Art Museum and the Arts Council. Working together these agencies have created a Public Art Walking Tour along the Rock River Recreational Path that connects residents and visitors to the arts and the outdoors. The two-mile walking tour features 16 sculptures donated to the Rockford Park District and placed either along the path or within the Nicholas Conservatory & Garden grounds. Walking tours can be self-guided or as a part of a 1 ½ hour tour that leaves from the Nicholas Conservatory.<sup>iii</sup>





Symbol - designed by Alexander Liberman



Suspended Motion – designed by Gene Horvath



Rock Men Guardians – designed by Terese Agnew

Several temporary sculptures are also located throughout Rockford as a part of the CRE8IV festival. As of June 2021, 16 sculptures have been added or have replaced the initial CRE8IV sculptures. As a temporary display, these sculptures will be changed every few years as a part of future CRE8TIV Art Festivals as a way to introduce residents and visitors to new and interesting sculptures.



320 South Wyman Street in downtown Rockford

In an effort to bring people together during the COVID-19 Pandemic, RACVB created a permanent sculpture of four-foot-tall “ROCKFORD” letters in Davis Park. The installation was intended to be a backdrop for photos and other outdoor activities and a way to encourage city pride during uncertainty.

### Museums and Learning Centers

The residents and visitors of Rockford also have access to numerous cultural attractions, such as museums and other learning centers. Museums are institutions created in the public interest to provide their visitors with an opportunity to expand their cultural or historic knowledge and promote diversity within society. Museums play a crucial role in preserving local culture, preserving artifacts, and remembering the past. Museums and public event centers also help to cultivate a respect and interest for different cultures and time periods, often bridging social gaps within a community.

Some of these institutions in Rockford are detailed below:

- **Discovery Center Museum:** Established in 1981, the Discovery Center is a beloved children’s museum with more than 25 hands-on art and science exhibits, including a planetarium and TV studio. Additionally, the Discovery Center hosts special events, traveling exhibits and classes, as well as being home to the nation’s first community built outdoor science park, which features a two-story maze, water play area, dinosaur fossil dig pit, and a secret garden.
- **Burpee Museum of Natural History:** This natural history



museum has a long history in the city's center and now has four floors with eight permanent exhibits, a space for temporary exhibits, and meeting rooms that can be used for private rentals. Permanent exhibits at the museum include the Windows to Wilderness, which focuses on the nature of the Rock River Valley, Woolly Mammoth skeletal cast, Pennsylvanian coal forest with simulated thunderstorms, Native American exhibit with full-sized dwellings, geoscience, and a viewing lab where visitors can watch Burpee Museum staff work on specimens from the museum's collections and recent dinosaur discoveries to contribute to their two dinosaur exhibits. The Burpee Museum is also the location of the first rooftop garden in Rockford.

- **Rockford Art Museum:** The Rockford Art Museum is housed adjacent to the Rockford Discovery Center and consists of three galleries over two floors. The art museum has more than 1,900 works that range from modern and contemporary art, photography, outsider art, contemporary glass, and regional art from Illinois artists.

- **Veterans Memorial Hall and Museum:** As the first of its kind, and dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, Veterans Memorial Hall is a dedication to local veterans of all wars. The museum preserves, displays, and shares the artifacts of Rockford and Winnebago County veterans who served in all branches of the military.

- **Midway Village Museum:** is an award-winning living history museum which provides visitors an immersive experience of a Victorian village situated on 13-acres and consists of 26 historical buildings that are filled with artifacts from the 19th century. In addition to the open-air museum, in their main museum center visitors can engage and explore Rockford's history through interactive exhibits in the more than 20,000 square feet of gallery spaces.

- **Erlander Home Museum:** The Erlander Home Museum is a cultural museum for Rockford's Swedish ancestry community in the historic Haight Village of Rockford. The museum is located within the home of John Erlander, built for his family in 1871. Collections at the museum include Rockford-made furniture and many artifacts recalling Swedish immigration to Northern Illinois and Rockford's Swedish heritage.

- **Ethic Heritage Museum:** The Rockford region was shaped by six nationalities, which are represented in this museum. The house, built in 1850, features a room for each ethnic group it represents: African American, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, and Hispanic.



Erlander Home Museum, Built in 1871

- **Beyer Stadium:** This stadium was home to the Rockford Peaches, the All-American Professional Girls Baseball League team, from 1943 to 1954. The stadium has since been restored to include re-created original scoreboards, vintage backstop, and a new baseball diamond. Following the renovation, the stadium lives out its legacy as home of Rockford's woman's baseball team, The Starfires.



Rockford Peaches Women's Baseball Team

- **Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum and Gardens:** This historic house museum is located near downtown Rockford, overlooking Kent Creek. The museum complex contains the historic house museum, barn, and carriage house built for the Tinker family in 1865. The property is the home of the founding site of Rockford and contains a Pre-Columbian Native American conical mound.

## Historic Preservation

Rockford has a rich history that is preserved in historic sites and buildings throughout the city. Rockford wishes to showcase, preserve, and utilize assets for years to come. The city has established the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) which provides proactive and practical guidance in order to preserve structures and neighborhoods that have historic significance. The HPC is a Certified Local Government (CLG) by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) which authorizes the

HPC to maintain and enforce guidelines regarding changes made to properties that are either locally designated landmarks or are a part of a locally designated historic district.

The city recognizes that historic preservation, like anything else, does not exist in a vacuum. Just as historic sites must be evaluated within the context of their surroundings and their history, they must also be viewed within the wider context of preservation of the community as a whole. However, this wider context needs to be evaluated very carefully and should not be used as a means of getting rid of something simply because it's old, beat up, and nobody seems to want it at the moment. When deciding whether or not to preserve something, we need to bear in mind that once a building or site has been destroyed, it's gone forever; there is no going back.

Historic preservation is important not only in retaining the physical evidence of the history and individual character of Rockford, but also as a tool in maintaining the viability of older neighborhoods. When looking at the historic districts around Rockford in comparison to similar nearby neighborhoods (both neighborhoods having homes similar in size and similar zoning), the value of these districts is clear. According to Winnebago County Assessor data, in 2019 the average assessed value of homes outside of a historic district was \$28,021.61, while the average assessed value of homes within a historic district was \$30,000.72, a difference of 4.5 percent. Similarly, fair market values show that homes outside of historic districts have a lower average fair market value of \$84,190 compared to homes within a historic district, which have an average fair market value of \$90,020.

As of January 2018, Rockford had designated the following six areas as local historic districts:

- Haight Village: Area bounded by South Madison, Walnut and Kishwaukee Streets and the Union Pacific Railroad to the south.
- Garfield Avenue: 600 through 900 blocks of Garfield Avenue.
- Indian Terrace: Indian Terrace south of the Armory, and including Beattie Park.
- Brown's Hills/Knightsville: This is most of the area lying between North Second Street on the west, Sinnissippi Park/Golf Course on the north, the Scandinavian Cemetery (Prospect Street) on the east and Rural Street on the

south, plus the four houses just north of the YMCA on the west side of North Second Street.

- Northeast State & Main: 201, 203 and 211 West State Street, plus 107 and 109 North Main Street.

- Peacock Brewery: 200 Prairie Street plus Brewmaster's House (stone house) at Northwest corner of Prairie and Madison Streets.

In addition, six districts have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These are:

- East Rockford: East State Street from the Rock River up to and including the Faust Landmark, north to Market Street and south to Walnut Street.
- Haight Village: Generally, the same area as the local district described plus the Watch Factory on the west side of Madison Street.
- 7th Street Commercial: Generally, properties fronting on 7th Street from Charles Street to Keith Creek.
- Barber-Colman Company: All 11 structures remaining on the Barber Colman site on Rock Street.
- West Downtown Rockford: Generally, follows an irregular boundary from Park Avenue north as far south as Elm Street, and from the alley west of Church Street east to Wyman Street.
- Garrison-Coronado-Haskell: Roughly bounded by Salem and Summer Streets on the north, Main and Court Streets on the east, Whitman and Fisher on the south and Ridge and North Avenue on the west.

## Important Historical Structures

Additionally, Rockford has 25 properties listed on the U.S. National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places, including; Valencia Court Apartments, Veterans Memorial Hall, the Brown Building, Lake-Peterson House, and Rockford Woman's Club; and 28 locally designated landmarks.<sup>iv</sup>

Locally designated landmarks include:

- Freeman School: Built in 1893, it is an example of the Romanesque revival style and was the second school building to be constructed on this site.



- **Erlander Home:** Built in 1871, the home served as the residence of John Erlander, one of Rockford's earliest settlers and business/civic leader. Since 1952, the home served as a museum for Swedish artifacts and early Rockford made furniture and historical records. It is located within the Haight Village.
- **7th Street Passenger Depot:** The passenger depot was built in 1911. The depot is one of two older remaining train depots in Rockford and the only passenger depot. It is the last restorable Chicago and Northwestern Depot in the Kenosha District (northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin).
- **Beyer Stadium Gatehouse:** Located one mile from downtown, the Beyer Stadium was the home of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League team, the Rockford Peaches, from 1943 to 1954.
- **Herrick-Logli Cobblestone House:** Built in 1847 in a Greek revival style, it is one of the oldest surviving buildings in Rockford and one of the few surviving cobblestone houses left in Illinois.
- **Lincoln Middle School:** Opened in 1926.
- **East High School:** Built at the same time as West High School and is a WPA (Works Project Administration) Project. The school is considered an excellent example of Art Modern architecture and focal point for the community from its beginning.
- **Anderson Building:** Built in 1867, the building is mid-19th century Italianate style. In 1970, the building was restored as close to its original design and character which served for a time, the nationally famous Rockford enterprise, Connie's Flowers & Dress Shop. The building also served as offices of Anderson Consolidated Industries Inc. for almost 20 years.
- **Garrison School:** Built in 1887, the school is a prime example of a late Victorian elementary school through its Romanesque facade and Queen Anne details. It is the oldest standing elementary school in Rockford and has since been transformed into loft-style apartments.
- **Winnebago County Courthouse Annex/Jail:** Built in 1916-1917 as an annex to the 1876 Winnebago County Courthouse. The building originally was home to the county offices on the first three floors and the jail on the fourth floor.
- **Elks Club Building:** A contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright, were the architects of the prairie-style building. Overall boxy shape, and horizontal lines, use of natural materials for decorative purposes and large overhanging eaves. It had an integral part in the evolution of commercial architecture in downtown Rockford. However, this structure is in serious danger of requiring demolition due to its neglect over recent years.
- **Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum:** Built in 1869 and is an exceptional example of picturesque cottage style. It is a 26-room frame cottage situated on a high bluff overlooking Kent Creek
- **Times Theatre:** Built in 1938, the building was one of two remaining example of Art Modern-style movie theater in Rockford. It opened in 1938 with visitors boasting about the theater's acoustics and fireproof and moth proof seating.
- **Coronado Theatre:** Built in 1927, Coronado serves as one of the best preserved atmospheric "movie palaces" of the 1920s. The theater contains a mix of Motifs-Spanish, Italian and French architecture, Italian sculpture and Chinese, Egyptian, and Persian art. The theater was virtually untouched until a major renovation in 1999.
- **Liebling (Jackson Piano) Building:** Known locally as the home of Jackson Piano Building, it is an excellent example of the Art Deco style from the 1930s. The interior of the structure was incorporated into the Coronado Theatre during the 1999-2000 renovation.
- **Illinois National Guard Armory:** Constructed in 1936, the building has been used both as the National Guard Headquarter until 1993 and as the primary civic auditorium until 1983. It was a venue for various social, recreational, and political events. It was built during the Depression era as part of the Work Progress Administration and Public Works Administration federal relief effort.
- **Burpee Museum of Natural History:** Designated as landmarks in 1983. The building was entirely turned over for museum space in 1971.
- **Chick House:** Former hotel building constructed in 1857 and was operated as a hotel until 1951. In 2004, the City of Rockford purchased two-thirds of the building and made modifications to the structure, which is a mix between Greek revival and Italianate styles.
- **Graham-Ginestra House:** Built in 1857, it is a transition

between Greek Revival and Italianate architectural styles and is now a museum.

- West Middle School: Originally built as part of the WPA project in 1939.
- Rockford City Hall: Original building was constructed in 1926 as the manufacture's national bank. The city of Rockford purchased the building in 1937, and built a 20,000 square foot addition in 1990.
- Shumway Market Building: Built in the 1920s, and was donated to the City of Rockford in 1904. The building was restored by the Rockford Areas Convention and Visitors Bureau in 1987 and currently houses the Rockford Area Arts Council.
- Midway Theatre: Opened for business in 1918, it was one of the largest "movie houses" of its kind. The original building was constructed in ornate Spanish renaissance style and originally contained a movie theatre, storefronts, apartment, and a basement that contained a bowling alley and recreation areas for Camp Grant soldier during WWI. It was a movie theatre until August of 1980 when a fire badly damaged the structure.
- Lake-Peterson House: Built in 1873, the house was considered one of the finest intact structures in Illinois built in the Victorian Gothic style.
- Four Squires Building: In the 1920s the original two building structure was combined and transformed from the original Italianate design into its current Art Deco. It serves as a focal point for the remaining block of downtown West State Street that is still intact.
- Booker Washington Center: Rockford's third school. It later became a central established for troops/soldiers and served as the only social enterprise for Rockford's African American populations. It was founded as the Colored Soldiers Club in 1916.
- Witwer (Bell) House: Built in 1876 by a local business owner/alderman. The inside has been restored but exterior of the house remains original.

# Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

## ARTS, CULTURE, & HISTORIC LANDMARKS

**Improve the quality and quantity of all forms of urban art, cultural landmarks, and historic preservation efforts**

Implementation Strategy	Cost	Timeframe	Priority
Establish matching grants or revolving loan funds for historic preservation	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to develop and implement the adopted wayfinding guidelines	\$\$	Short	Medium
Continue to promote cultural assets through public art and event nights	\$\$	Medium	High
Work to make retail centers more attractive destinations and any new development to be held to higher design standards	\$	Short	Medium
Create active and secure open spaces, define neighborhoods with visual cues, increased signage, entryways, and street lighting design	\$\$	Medium	Medium
Continue to preserve scenic vistas through the appropriate location of telecommunications towers and removal of billboards from the city; and enact clear design guidelines so that streets, buildings, and public spaces work together to create a sense of place	\$	Short	Medium
Add properties that qualify for designation as landmarks or historic designation	\$	Long	Medium
Continue to support citywide art and beautification projects	\$\$	Short	High
Continue with the Creative Program- Art Installations -Sculptors, local and traveling art exhibits	\$\$	Short	High
Setup a tour for the murals/art installations- to keep them relevant and to highlight the locations better	\$	Short	Low
Develop an interactive public art map that describes artists and shows their information	\$	Short	Medium
Bring new public art displays into the neighborhoods	\$	Short	High
Design art around neighborhood history that depicts important events, people, and contributors to our region	\$	Short	High
Promote Wavepark and other recreational facilities that are unique sports attractions or venues	\$	Medium	Medium
Establish a list that can be updated and added to highlight local amenities by category or type	\$	Medium	Medium



## Chapter Endnotes

- i CRE8IV: Transformational Art In Rockford | May 15-19, 2019 (gorockford.com)
- ii About Us | The Rockford Area Arts Council (artsforeveryone.com)
- iii PubArtBrochure\_68eccf98-fcf6-4b86-a24a-568e46d4db7b.pdf (simpleviewinc.com)
- iv <https://rockfordil.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ROCKFORD-LANDMARKS-HISTORIC-DISTRICTS-2020.pdf>



## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REVIEW, & ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### Public Participation Process

Focusing on public participation is an important part of a comprehensive plan update to ensure that the community's wants and needs are addressed. It's important to engage with the public early in the process, using an array of techniques and strategies, and to include as many opportunities for participation in the process by as many people as possible. It's easy to ask the community for input, but ensuring that participation is productive and equitable may be more difficult given the situation with COVID-19 and the restrictions in place limiting in-person gatherings. However, by utilizing digital engagement, and outreach strategies, combined with gathering information at more controlled, and smaller, information/participation events, the results of the public participation process will be satisfactory.

By actively engaging the public throughout the duration of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan update, citizens have the chance to influence decisions that are important to them. Public involvement is essential to gather enough information to accurately represent the public. Engaging the public early in the process is important. Additionally, it's important to have a clear, concise, and realistic message that's consistent throughout the planning process. This will help to garner support and ensure trust in order to keep the focus positive and the planning process moving forward.

Public involvement is essential for a Comprehensive Plan to be considered valid.

### Rockford City Market Engagement Efforts

Included open discussions and information provided to community members, a visioning board, and a community survey was given as an option to participate. Additionally, with the assistance of the Region 1 Planning Council, city staff had a booth at two Friday night Rockford City Market events; once in July, and again in August of 2021.

### High school Career Fairs

City staff attended two local high school career fairs where we had the ability to discuss topics that were important to teenagers that live in the region. A half day was spent at both Boylan Catholic High School and Jefferson High School. Students also had the ability to take a survey to help us determine areas the city is doing well in and areas that may need improvement. Results from these two events were combined with the other online surveys.

### Online Community Survey

The survey consisted of 11 questions that varied from basic demographic information, multiple choice, rankings, funding options, and an open ended comment section. The survey went live in February 2022, and was closed before the DRAFT Plan Comment Period. At that time, there was a total of 930 completed surveys. The results of the survey are to follow this chapter. The complete list of written comments are contained in the Public Participation Appendix Results.

## Public Notice of 30-Day Comment Period

Based on the comments received during the public notice of 30-day comment period city staff is confident that all of the concerns addressed are covered in the current version of the plan.



### PRESS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Colin Belle**

**Planning & Design Coordinator**

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**April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Phone: (779) 500-6580**

**Email: [Colin.Belle@rockfordil.gov](mailto:Colin.Belle@rockfordil.gov)**

## PUBLIC NOTICE OF 30-DAY COMMENT PERIOD

### City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan Update

ROCKFORD, IL – The City of Rockford is pleased to announce that we'll be accepting public comments on the update to the City's Comprehensive Planning document.

The Comprehensive Plan acts as a guide to coordinate and align zoning and land-use, transportation infrastructure, economic development investments, natural resources, open space protection, and the general needs and concerns of community members. The plan serves as the community's voice and portrays what the future could look like while serving as the decision-making tool for elected and appointed officials regarding overall development, conservation, and public investment within the City and just beyond its borders.

This plan update will allow the City of Rockford to refine its vision to maintain and enhance the quality of life for our community well into the future while remaining resilient. This will be accomplished through specific implementation strategies and goals which are outlined in each chapter. The plan was developed with help from the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee which was made up of members of the public, professionals, elected officials, civic leaders, and city staff.

The public comment period will begin on April 10<sup>th</sup>, and conclude on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

A digital version of the plan is located on the front page of the City of Rockford website, <https://rockfordil.gov/>, and hard copies of the Draft Comprehensive Plan are located at the following locations:

- Rockford City Hall - 425 East State Street, Rockford IL, 61104. First floor Permit Window
- Rockford Public Library (Hart Interim) – 214 North Church Street, Rockford IL, 61101
- Rockford Public Library (Montague Branch) – 1238 South Winnebago Street, Rockford IL, 61102
- Rockford Public Library (East Branch) – 6685 East State Street, Rockford IL, 61108

Comments may be submitted electronically to the following email address: [Colin.Belle@rockfordil.gov](mailto:Colin.Belle@rockfordil.gov)



## Next Steps in the Process to Adopt the 2030 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan

During the 9/18/2023 City Council meeting the 2030 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan will be referred to the Planning & Development (P&D) Committee for a presentation and public hearing.

The 2030 Plan will appear as a committee report on the P&D agenda on 9/25/2023. At that time a presentation outlining the overall planning process that lead to the development of the final 2030 City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan will be given by city staff. The discussion will also serve as a notice and opportunity for public hearing as required by the Illinois Municipal Code (65 ILCS 5/11-12-7).

After a recommendation by the Planning and Development Committee the 2030 Plan will move to adoption by resolution from a Rockford City Council vote at the regularly scheduled meeting on 10/2/2023.

## WIFR News Article on Community Survey

### The City of Rockford turns to residents to fill out survey regarding future plans for the region

By Quini Amma

Published: Mar. 23, 2022 at 6:23 PM CDT

ROCKFORD, Ill. (WIFR) - The City of Rockford calls on all of its residents to take part in a survey that will help revamp and improve the area.

“You name the kind of food or the kind of coffee or maybe if you’re into sports or martial arts they have quite a variety,” says resident Matt Fogarty. Rockford city leaders want to take the pulse of the people who live here. They would like everyone to take the online survey about things they enjoy about their city and areas they believe need to be fixed. “The new murals that are popping up in the community they’re making the city in downtown look really nice,” says resident Valeria Castello.

The survey, which has about a dozen questions, covers everything from streets and sidewalks to events and housing. Colin Belle is a planning and design coordinator with the City of Rockford. He helped put the survey together and says the answers will help leaders update Rockford’s comprehensive plan for the next 10 to 20 years.

“It’s a really important part of that planning process is public participation and public involvement,” says Belle.

### The City of Rockford turns to residents to fill out survey regarding future plans for the region



# Rockford City Market Community Survey

## Community Survey



### Process & Results

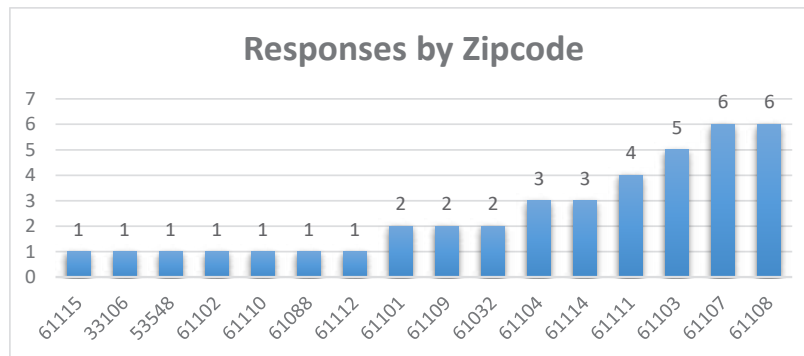
The following survey was administered over two days (August 13th, 2021 & September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021) to members of the public while at the Rockford City Market. In total 40 surveys were completed. Additional participants chose not to complete a survey but rather to leave a short written comment on our message board.

**The answers you provide will be used to help rank the importance of the range of topics covered in the plan**

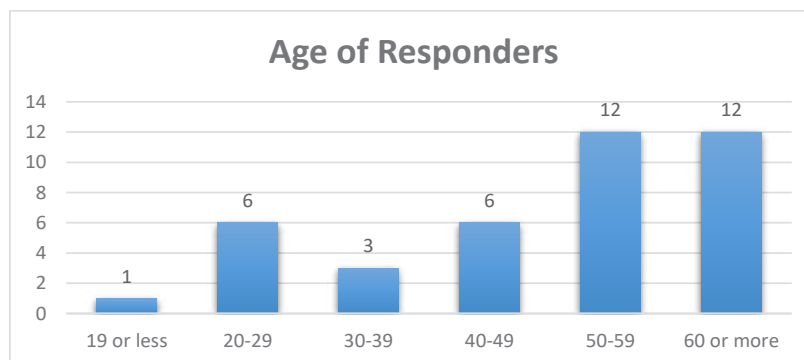
1. Do you live in Rockford? **83%** Yes | **16%** No

Do you work in Rockford? **53%** Yes | **48%** No

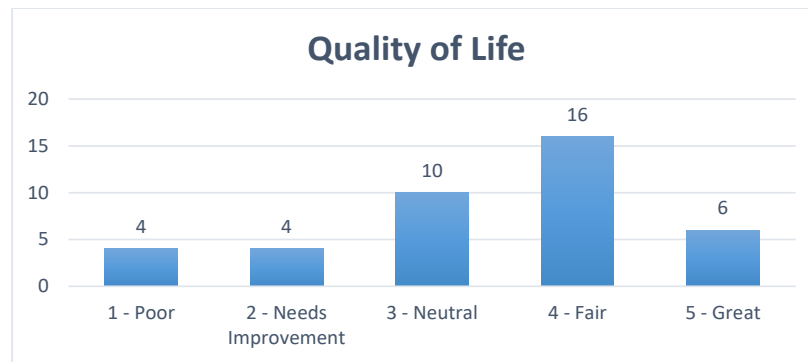
2. What Zip Code do you live in?



3. What category best describes your age?



#### 4. How would you rate the quality of life in Rockford?



#### 5. Respondents were asked to rank important community assets with 1 being most important. These were the results.

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Public Safety & Health           | 6. Parks, Recreation, & Open Space        |
| 2. Education                        | 7. Arts, Culture, & Historic Preservation |
| 3. Economic Development & Workforce | 8. Environment & Natural Resources        |
| 4. Housing                          | 9. Land-Use Planning                      |
| 5. Transportation & Mobility        |   |

#### 6. Respondents were asked to rank how important the following types of housing options are to them with 1 being most important. These were the results.

- |                                      |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Single-Family Homes               | 4. Multi-Family Homes                 |
| 2. More Affordable Housing Options   | 5. Newly Constructed Homes/Apartments |
| 3. Senior/Assisted Living Facilities | 6. Low-Income/Rent Assisted Housing   |

#### 7. Respondents were asked where investment in Urban Areas should be focused with 1 being the most important. These were the results.

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Affordable Housing                | 6. Parks & Recreation          |
| 2. Transportation Improvements       | 7. Retail Stores               |
| 3. Bike & Pedestrian Facilities      | 8. Agriculture/Food Production |
| 4. Tourism/Event Venues              | 9. Other                       |
| 5. Commercial/Industrial Development |                                |

#### 8. Respondents were asked where investment in Suburban Areas should be focused with 1 being the most important. These were the results.

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Parks & Recreation                | 6. Tourism/Event Venues        |
| 2. Affordable Housing                | 7. Retail Stores               |
| 3. Bike & Pedestrian Facilities      | 8. Agriculture/Food Production |
| 4. Commercial/Industrial Development | 9. Other                       |
| 5. Transportation Improvements       |                                |



9. Respondents were asked where investment in Transportation should be focused with 1 being the most important. These were the results.

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Roadway Improvements                           | 4. Passenger Rail Service             |
| 2. Bicycle Paths, Lanes & Other Bike Facilities   | 5. More Public Transportation Options |
| 3. Sidewalks, Crosswalks, & Pedestrian Facilities | 6. Bridges & Overpass                 |
| Passenger Rail Service                            | 7. Other                              |

10. Respondents were asked which 3 topic are the most important issues facing our city. The results are listed in order of highest importance with each category showing detailed responses.

#### Crime – Reducing Violence – Public Safety – Police Related Concerns

Violence and Crime	11		
Public Safety	4		
Stop Police Violence	1		
More Police	1		
Police Transparency	1		
Parks unsafe	1		
Illegal Drug Use	1		
LGBTQ Population is Unsafe	1	21	29%

#### Transportation – Roadway Infrastructure & Bridges – Pedestrian Safety – Bicycle Concerns

Improve Roads and Bridges	7		
Improve Sidewalks/Pedestrian Safety	3		
Outdated Transportation Infrastructure	1		
RR Pedestrian Crossing Unsafe Downtown by Taco Betty's	1		
Improve Public Transportation, RMTD	1		
Increase/Improve Bicycle Safety	1		
More Bike Lanes	1		
11th St. Road Repair	1		
Beautify Streets	1	17	23%

#### Jobs – Education

More Jobs	5		
Improve Schools/Education	3		
Buses for all children not just a certain distance from school	1	9	12%

### Taxes – Government Budgets – Government Transparency/Corruption

Government Spending/Balanced Budget	3	7	10%
Lower Taxes	2		
Government Transparency	1		
Government Corruption	1		

### Poverty – Blight – Property Maintenance Concerns – Homelessness

Disinvestment and Poverty in Westside	2	7	10%
Blight/Property Maintenance	2		
Homelessness	2		
Address Abandoned Businesses	1		

### Business Concerns – Economic Development

Small Business Assistance	1	4	5%
Attract More Diverse Businesses	1		
Economic Development	1		
Remove Cherryvale Mall/Replace Cherryvale Mall with Outlets	1		

### Housing Concerns

Affordable Housing	2	4	5%
Reduce Public Housing Assistance	1		
Housing Availability	1		

### Other

Gas Prices	1	4	5%
More Downtown Activities	1		
Need More Ice Rinks	1		
Make Downtown More Welcoming	1		

11. Respondents were then asked to provide any additional thoughts or feedback related to the City of Rockford on areas that need improvement or any positive thoughts they have.

- Fix crime issues
- The crime needs to come down. I wish everyone would understand and get along
- Take care of the Native American mounds
- Rockford or Freedom
- More restaurants downtown
- Support for small businesses
- Community gardens
- Activities at City Market for kids to do
- Maps for bike paths
- Overall Rockford is a great place to live. With more improvements to our City this place would be great to live.
- Thank you to everyone who works hard to make Rockford better!
- I've only lived in Rockford a short while but already see it has so many strengths!
- Make crossing the train tracks more wheelchair accessible
- RTD expansion, public transportation

Additionally, there was a 30x40 message board that allowed city market attendees the opportunity to leave comments about our city. The responses are outlined below.

- Additional incentives are needed for start-up/new businesses due to costs being too high. Carmel Indiana has a program that works well for an example.
- Great public parks and playgrounds in Rockford
- Great parks and bike paths but need more on street bike lanes
- City market, more public events such as summer/winter concerts
- More bike lanes downtown
- Gun violence
- Bike maps that make sense and are easy to read
- More small businesses downtown
- Reduce property taxes
- Reduce crime
- RMTD needs more routes, more often. Ride rates are not too high though
- Golf. Pay attention to golf pass holders in fall.



# Online Community Survey



## Rockford Community Survey

Thank You for Taking Our Survey!

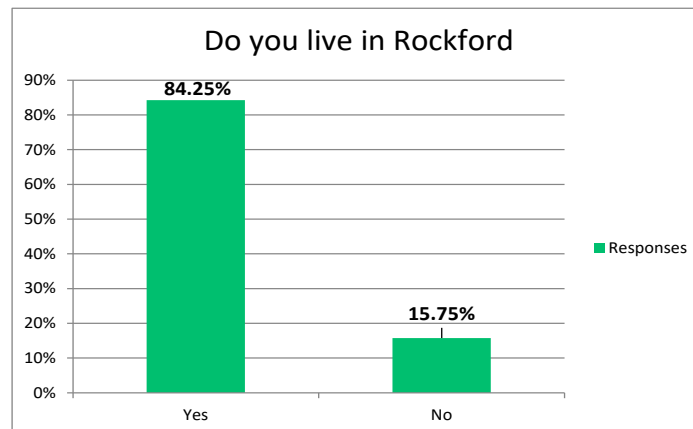
Your individual responses will be kept confidential, and won't be shared. The information collected will be used to help update the City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan.



## Rockford Community Survey

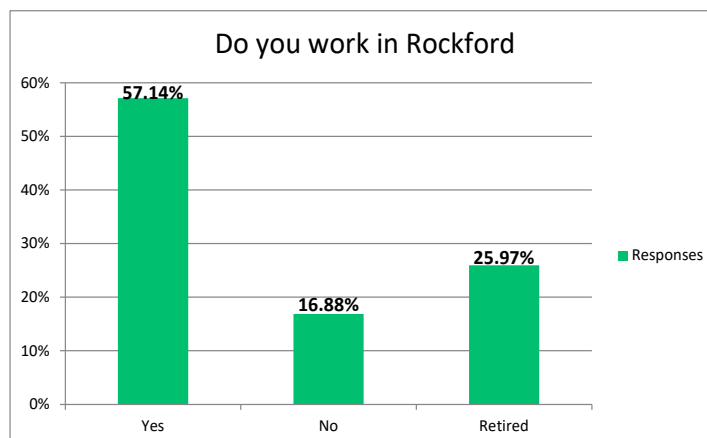
1. Do you live in Rockford?

927 total responses



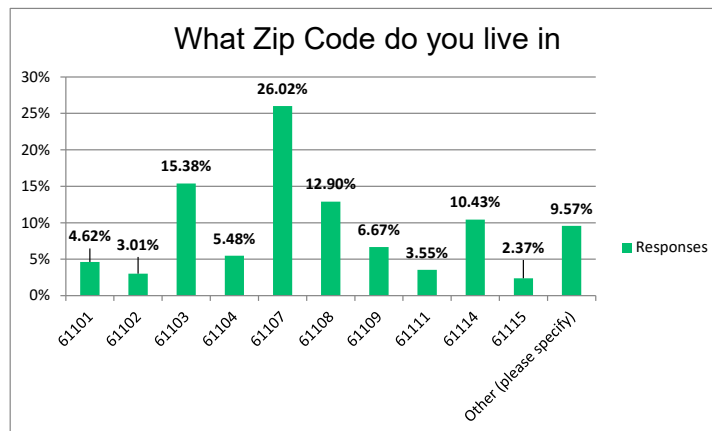
2. Do you work in Rockford?

924 total responses



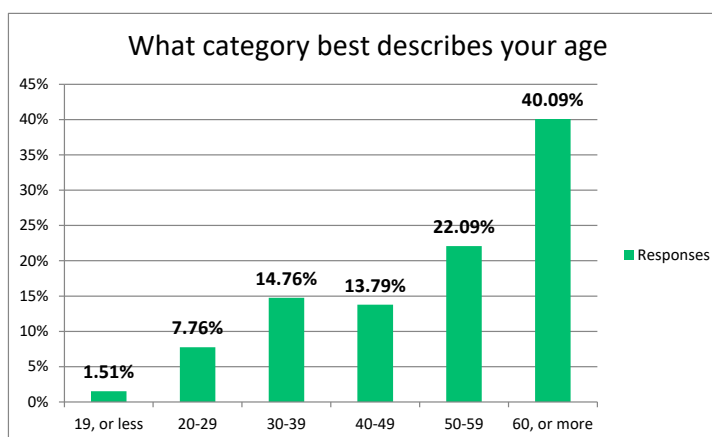
### 3. What Zip Code do you currently live in?

930 total responses



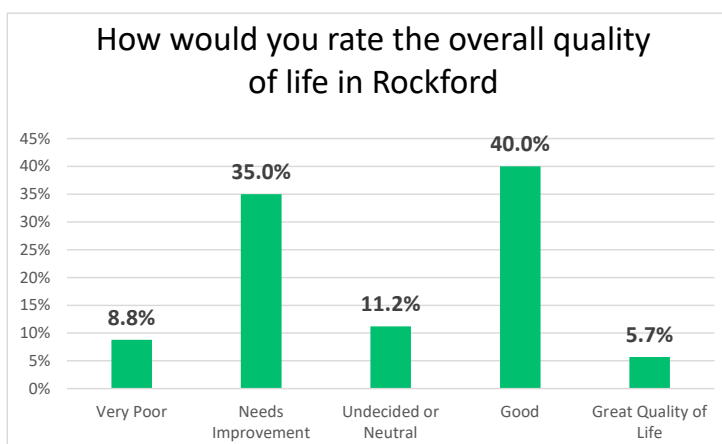
### 4. What category best describes your age?

928 total responses



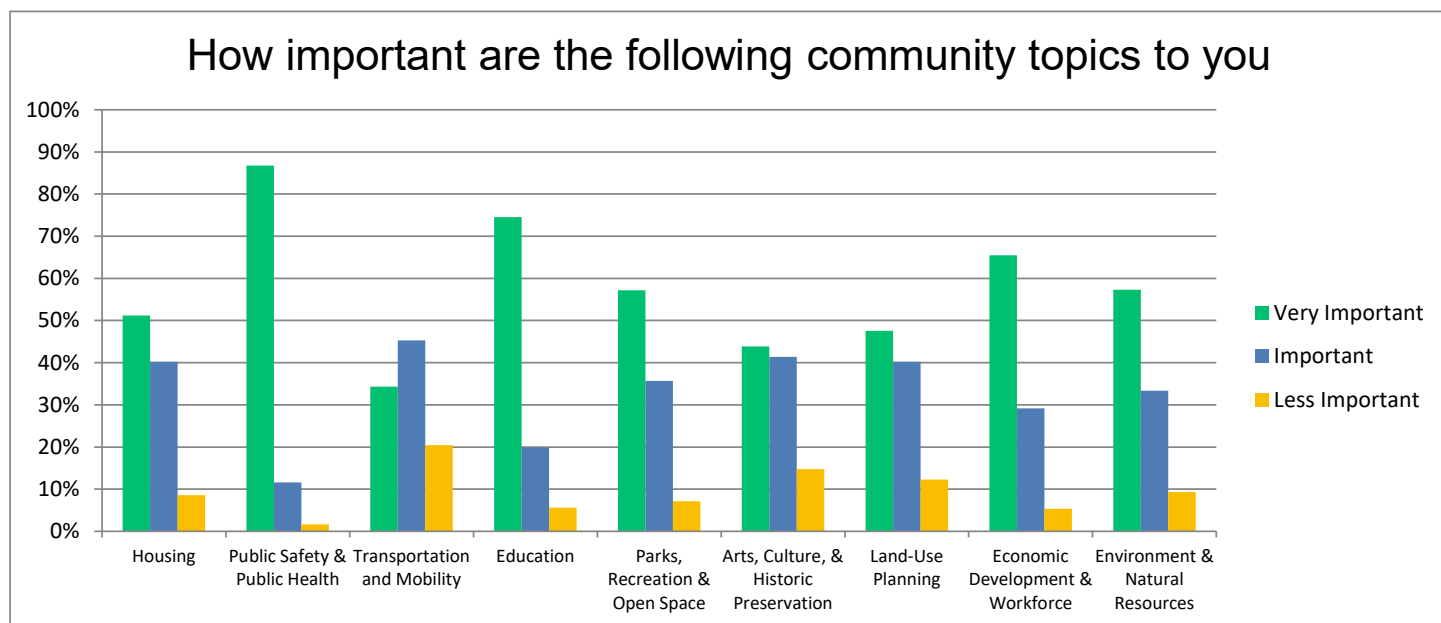
### 5. How would you rate the overall quality of life in Rockford?

924 total responses



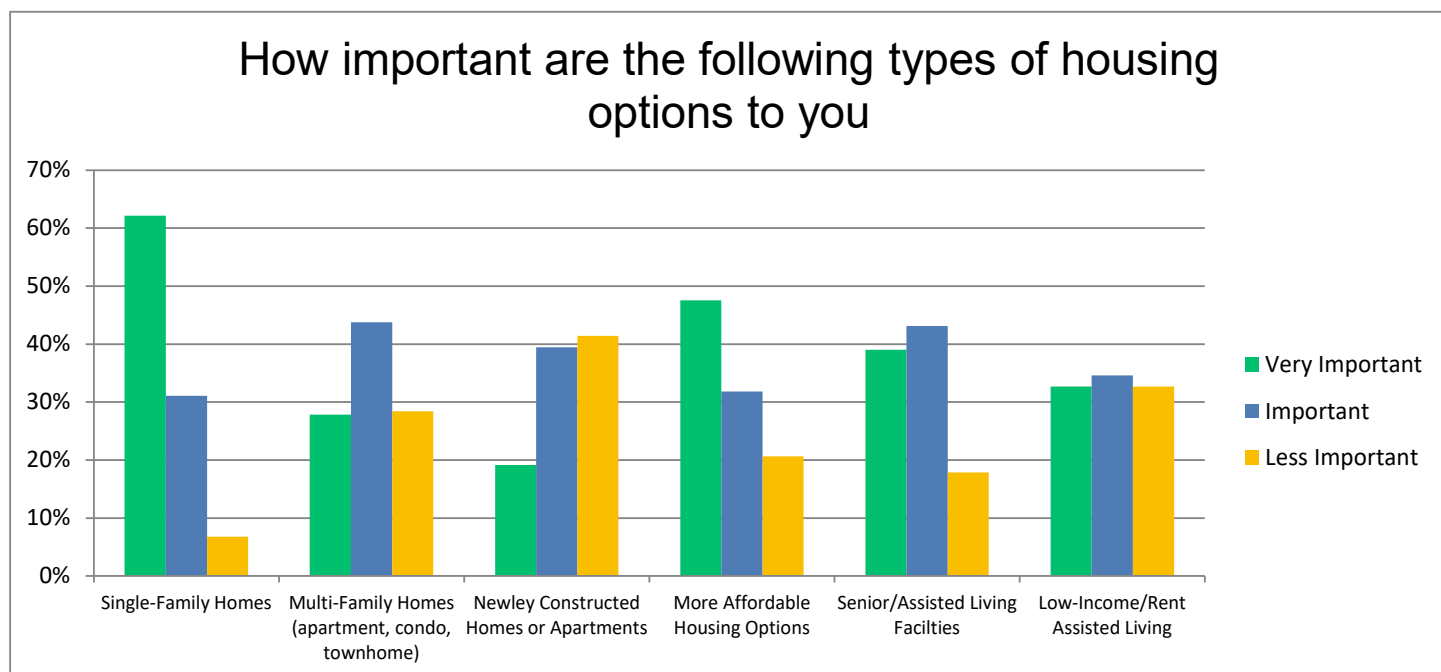
## 6. How important are the following community topics to you?

930 total responses



## 7. How important are the following types of housing options to you?

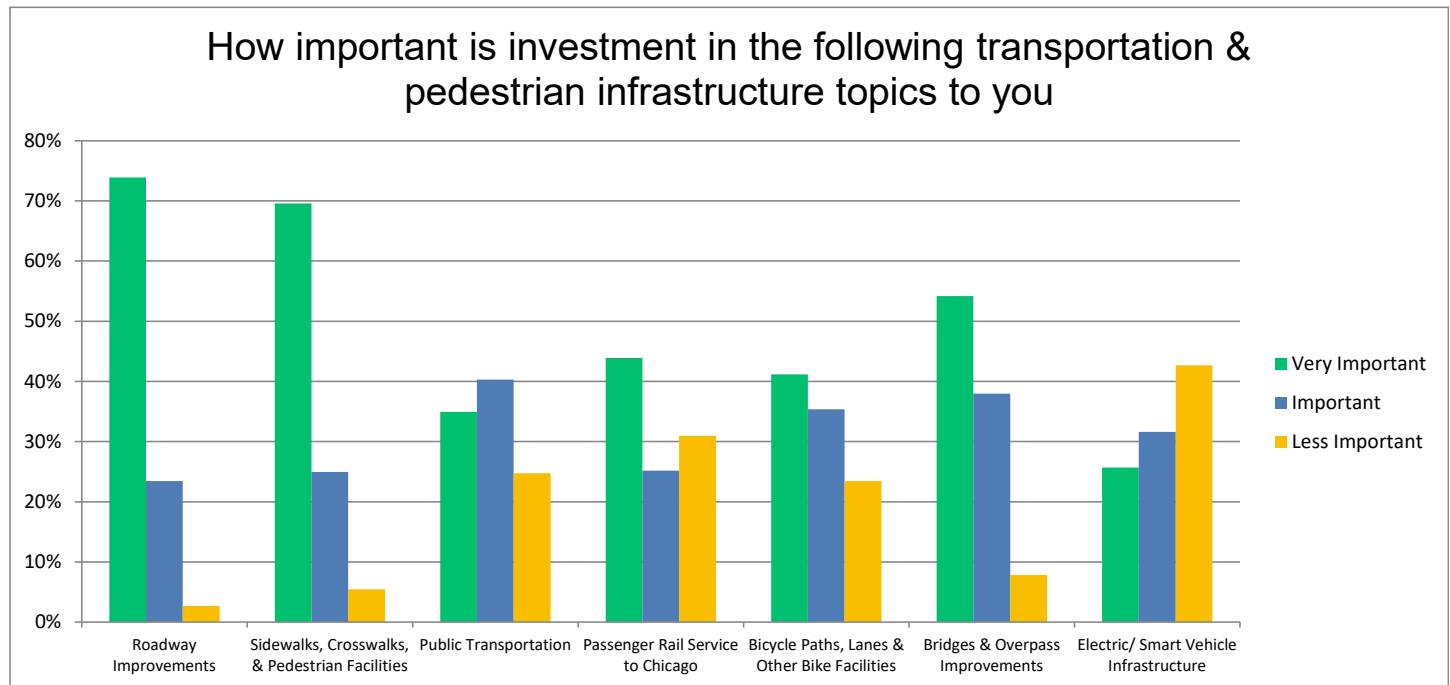
930 total responses





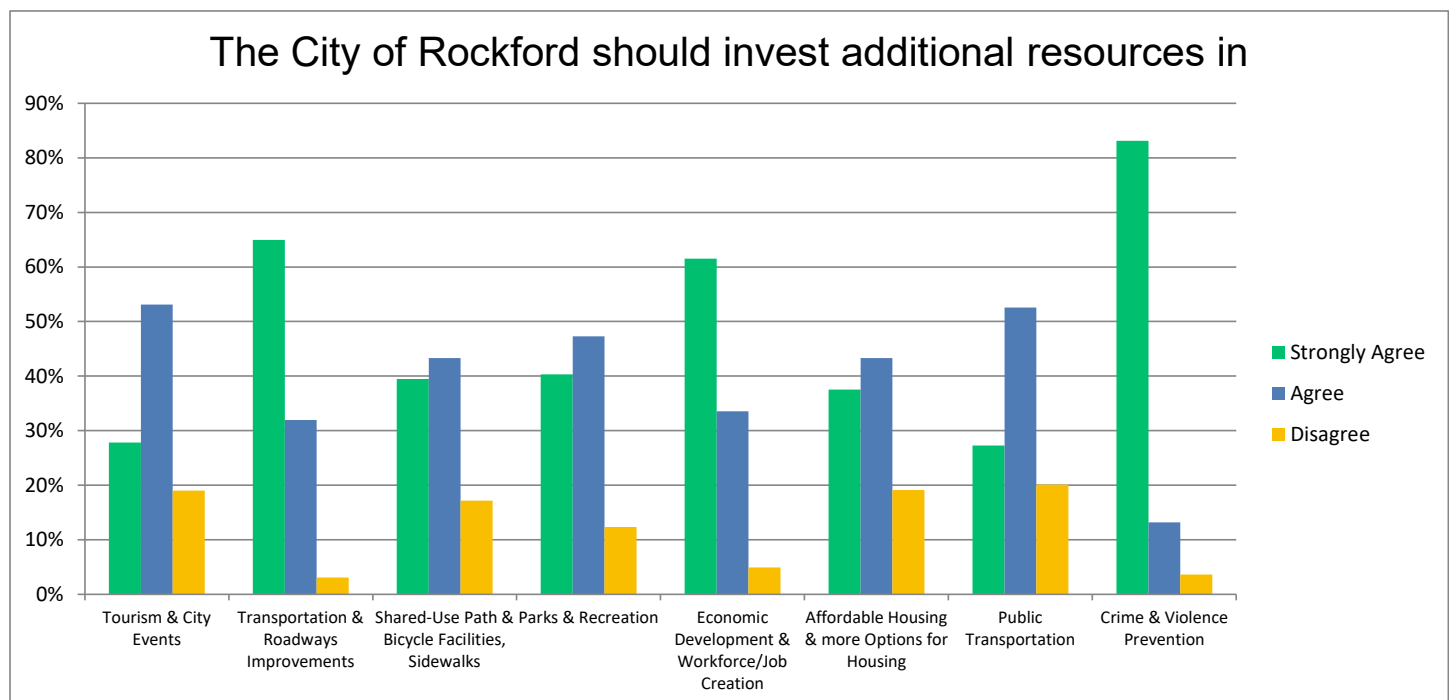
8. How important is investment in the following transportation and pedestrian infrastructure topics to you?

930 total responses



9. How important is investment in the following transportation and pedestrian infrastructure topics to you?

930 total responses



## 10. What are the most important issues currently facing our city?

Below is a sampling of the almost 900 total responses to this survey question from the public.

*Our family recently moved to Rockford from just outside of Atlanta, Ga. We spent a lot of time looking for a home here starting back in October of 2021. We have no attachment to Rockford and my wife and I are both from the south. The one thing I found interesting is when we would tell people we met here during our many trips up that we were looking to move here we would often have people ask us "why would you do that?" or tell us to not move here and stay in the south. It's so disheartening here people speak so ill of the place they live. We are currently renovating the house we bought in the Edgewater neighborhood and renting a home nearby in the area.*

*Affordable housing. Transitioning from low income housing/government assisted housing to affordable housing/single family residences is a generational culture changer.*

*Continue to support agencies that create decent and affordable housing. It is equally as important to provide assistance with repairs that are necessary to keep existing homes in good condition for homeowners who have financial struggles.*

*Transportation accessibility, attracting & maintaining workforce/population, reducing violence in struggling areas.*

*Honestly - the residents. There seems to be an increasing number of people who simply don't care about the community. So much trash thrown out car windows, speeding down rural streets particularly where children are playing, not doing anything to take care of the appearance of their home, and most certainly the amount of violence especially from younger offenders. Also, panhandlers - crime and very high property taxes and sales tax.*

*The perception, whether real or not, that Rockford is no longer a safe and vibrant place to live.*

*Bike or walking path connection between Highcrest road and the river. It's extremely dangerous in its current state.*

*More youth programs to mitigate crime/violence. Stop lights need better timing in this entire city!! People speed just to get through the lights. Need more West side investments too!!"*

*Crime, blighted properties, housing and public safety.*

*Making Rockford safe for all it's population. Crime, childhood trauma & poverty.*

*Improvements to our education, economic development, and physical infrastructure (including recreational) are leading indicators that deserve attention in order to address crime and violence, which are lagging indicators of a city's success.*

*Domestic violence reduction, violent crime, education improvements.*

*Education. Early childhood opportunities. We need rail to Chicago. Public green spaces along the river. Combating domestic violence and poverty.*

*Affordable housing, infrastructure, public health, education.*

*Reckless driving, public safety, and transportation options for all modes of travel.*

*The lack of a strong Mental Health component and its relationship to numerous social problems: crime, drug abuse, domestic violence and community violence, unenlightened punishment (not spending resources to rehabilitate persons in prison), lack of educational success, lack of a motivated/skilled workforce development, deteriorating neighborhoods, lack of a feeling of connectedness with each other by our citizens. We need to care about each other enough to step in and become active in the solution to our community concerns.*

*Generational poverty and how it is the root cause of so many issues in our community. Helping individuals build resources and become self-sufficient would be a great proactive approach the city could take.*

*Crime is hands down number 1. We need to start enforcing basic rules, such as speeding, and work up from there. Currently, people are way too lax with basic laws and it shows. Littering, speeding, rolling stops, etc. need to be reigned in.*

*Help return pride to the neighborhoods. Community standards, curb appeal from trash, to abandoned cars, out of date tags on cars parked all over.*

*The stranglehold that Schnucks has on the neighborhoods that once had accessible grocery stores. We have a need to educate the influx of new residents about community standards. We need more bilingual communications, and less litter and bottles pitched out of car windows.*

*We need ability to walk or ride bikes across the Whitman St. Bridge better. We need snow sidewalk plows that keep walkways open and discourage people from walking in the street, especially Auburn St.*

*Equitable education for all, living wage employment, grocery stores in food deserts of town.*

*Aging population and infrastructure (mainly roads and bridges) need more upkeep.*

*Diversity and spreading resources throughout the entire city not just the East side of town. Every side of Rockford should have something similar to 173/251 with grocery stores, restaurants, etc. I have been told there is not enough money on that side of town. No way possible .... Those same people travel to the grocery store, restaurants, and shopping.*

*Lack of affordable housing options for the working class. High number of pedestrian deaths caused by vehicles. General lack of safety for people traveling by foot or bike in the city. Over reliance on policing as a means of fostering public safety when stats do not pan out. Continued development of downtown to make it pedestrian friendly and sustainable.*

*Rising cost of living, rent, utilities, food, basic necessities - This is a national and global issue that creates barriers for those who are low income to lifting themselves out of poverty, and hurdles for the middle and working classes to maintain standards of living, leading to animosity and divisiveness. This leads to two parents working, or single parents working multiple jobs, which leaves less time for time with youth and impacts poor graduation rates and education outcomes. Support for families with affordable housing, student meal support, transportation and fee coverages for sports and extra curricular activities, etc. can keep people fully engaged, and help families provide the time and care they want to for their children. High cost of living also drives people out of our community (on top of taxes) which reduces our tax base.*

*Other issues: Low opportunities for rehabilitation, social support, workforce training and support for justice-involved individuals to fully participate in society. Low graduation rates and school performance.*

*Housing in disrepair, vacant buildings and homes. Need push to identify landlords and homeowners at risk of losing homes due to back taxes or due to ongoing neglect, and options to buy them out to create affordable housing or to allow them to fix their home/building with the addition of a lien or with long-term, low-interest loans to pay contractors to complete repairs.*

*Environmental sustainability. Protecting land and water. Environmental health of soil, water and air. Mitigating climate change. TREES!*



## 11. What do you like about Rockford?

**Below is a sampling of the almost 900 total responses to this survey question from the public.**

*The wonderful options to take part in socially, culturally, and environmentally. I think Rockford is heading in a positive direction. It is a wonderful big city/small town combination!*

*I love the diversity. Our strength is in our community of people. People of all stripes. Community organizations are tremendously valuable.*

*I love the old homes as well as the intercity feel. I'm from the Atlanta metro area and lived in the city for 7 years before moving out to the suburbs. Rockford feels a lot like what inner city Atlanta felt like 7-8 years ago.*

*Downtown, parks, affordable housing, proximity to Chicago and Madison*

*I appreciate the diversity of this community. This diversity allows groups of people and individuals to come close to each other. It is hard to hate someone once you are close to them.*

*I love the diversity of the community and the wonderful people that work hard to help our city improve.*

*I like that it has a wealth of locally owned businesses, a great local art scene, and is easily accessible from so many large cities.*

*I moved here from Madison, WI as house prices became unaffordable. Housing is affordable here. I live in 61111 so I do not see the direct impact of crime or other things downtown, but being outside of the center but still close to Rockford. I like that folks don't sugar coat it here and it is a working class vibe. Nothing to hide. I've lived in southern California before and it has the same vibe here.*

*Downtown has developed little by little by individuals giving it character instead of one developer. The river flows through town and there are marinas and boaters. There are ample parks and recreational programs.*

*Although I don't live in Rockford, I shop and dine out in Rockford many times per week. I like the dining, shopping, and entertainment options.*

*City is full of history and some really impressive houses. It could be so much better and a place that people want to relocate to, because of what is offered.*

*I'm from a really small town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, so to me, Rockford is a pretty great place to live. Access to lots of shopping, close proximity to big cities, plenty of outdoor recreational space.*

*Love, love that the downtown is slowly coming back to life with housing!! People in market rate apartments walking around shopping/eating, etc.. is lovely. I love the arts community - West Side Show Room is such a wonderful addition. I love the art shows throughout the year and the diversity of people who frequent them. I love the preservation of the buildings and am encouraged by the small businesses opening up and being supported by our community. I like the progressive minded thinking of our city leaders and the willingness to do new things.*

*I like the direction that Rockford is going with investments in the city's downtown--I love the downtown. The growing airport as a hub and job training in the air industry.*

*It's a big small town. We have beautiful places (of course, we need to stop tearing down the old buildings!). We have nice events. City Market, Stroll on State, Greenwich Art Show, etc. We have some great history.*

*Size, diversity, open spaces, the Rock River, proximity to Chi, Mad, Mil; cost of living, the city market...*

*For the most part we have dedicated and skilled staff and community leaders, all doing their part to make life better for all of us. We have numerous groups and individuals dedicated to addressing all of our deficiencies. We have a lot of people who CARE.*

*I was raised in Oregon IL. Rockford is like living in a big small town with better activities, diversity and shopping and health care*

*Walkable downtown, parks & recreation (i.e. mountain biking and hiking)*

*Many things, but I'm grateful for the solid education I got in Rockford, from kindergarten through college. The education is here to get if people want it. We need a city-wide effort to create an environment where the students appreciate what they have and stop complaining about the actual work. How do I know this is the problem? I substitute taught in 82 schools in 7 districts locally. I have seen that negative attitudes and fighting amongst the adults is giving the kids excuses to not do their work, which means they're not learning the basics; they're trying to find ways out of doing the work by creating chaos in the room, the halls and with the assignments.*

*Hubby and I moved here in 1996 and really can't complain about any certain thing. We like that there are many different stores and restaurants to choose from to patronize. We also like that our police officers who have responded to a call from us have been patient and respectful! We also like that our garbage is always picked up and the streets are kept decently clean!*

*Our potential. We have a great quality of life - for some residents. If we can understand that ALL residents should have that same QOL, I believe we will be an attractive city that will draw more opportunity, increased resident base, lower crime, and lower taxes... but we have to be willing to understand our potential and the root cause issues that persistently keep us from reaching our potential.*

*Cultural activities, parks, libraries as well as the beauty of the city. The caring people, enormous possibilities for over-all improvement & location in the US to other major cities.*

*The beautiful old architecture. The parks and recreation are outstanding compared to other places, and they should be promoted and invested into as the highlight of our city. We have the potential to be a really great city- geographically speaking we have easy access in every direction. Our city has a rich history and so much to offer residents and tourists alike. I truly believe Rockford has the potential to be considered one of the greatest US cities to live in if only we would put all efforts into attracting and keeping the residents that pay the expenses required to maintain or improve a city. This does not mean get rid of low-income; instead, we need to focus on putting all our energy into attracting great homeowners (aka taxpayers) which will snowball into allowing more opportunities for low-income improvements. When you have an overflow of growth, everything gets improved by default.*

*It's a big small town. We have beautiful places (of course, we need to stop tearing down the old buildings!). We have nice events. City Market, Stroll on State, Greenwich Art Show, etc. We have some great history.*

*Rockford is really a great city with many positive attributes and many caring people. Unfortunately, as is true everywhere, media focuses on the negative aspects of the news, and not enough positive. Overall, I think the City leaders are doing a commendable job.*

*With a vehicle it's easy to navigate - traffic isn't intimidating like other large cities. Easy access to plentiful nature spaces. Many types of communities to join. A large amount of retail options to buy pretty much anything you could need. A responsive city government that is working to improve lives of all citizens not just the wealthy or voter base.*







## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT PROCESS

### What is a Comprehensive Plan Amendment

The City of Rockford will amend or make updates to its comprehensive planning document based on changes that may affect the region's growth policies, development strategies, new or shifting funding allocations, or projects and studies that are deemed pertinent to the implementation of future development initiatives. All amendments to the City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan go through the City Council for discussion, approval, and final adoption.

The City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan will be subject to continual review and evaluation by city staff and elected officials. Additionally, the city plans to review the comprehensive plan on at least a five (5) year basis. This will ensure that the plan aligns with new policies, transportation improvement projects, economic development advancements, and additional funding sources as they may become available. The overall purpose of periodic review is to ensure that the City of Rockford Comprehensive Plan is updated to respond to changes in local, regional, and state conditions; is coordinated with other regionally significant comprehensive plans and investments; and is in compliance with the statewide planning goals, statutes, and other governing rules or regulations.

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Tyler Yomantas Photography

